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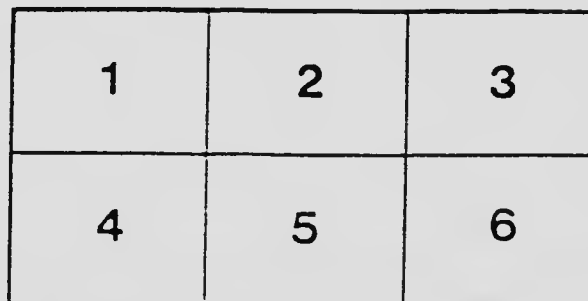
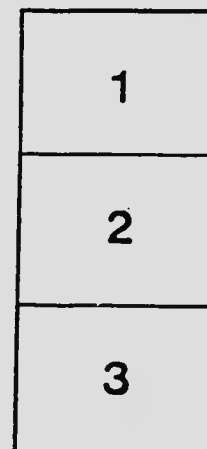
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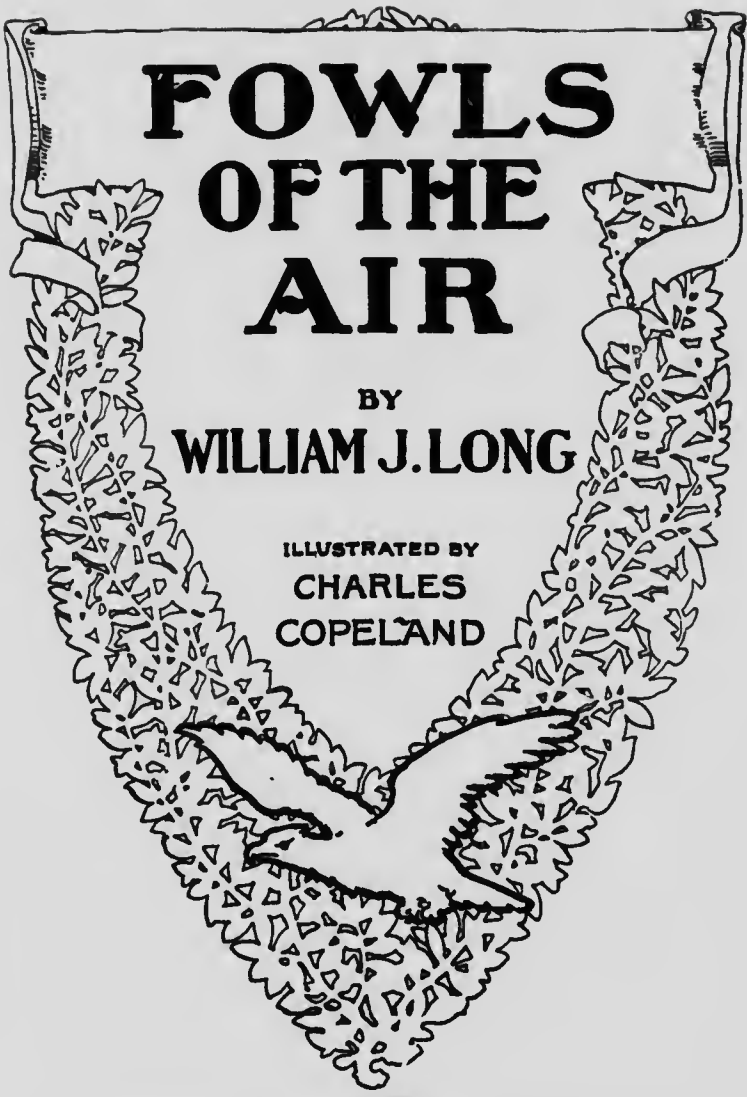
Striking the decoys with a great splash and clatter

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# FWLS OF THE AIR

BY  
WILLIAM J. LONG

ILLUSTRATED BY  
CHARLES  
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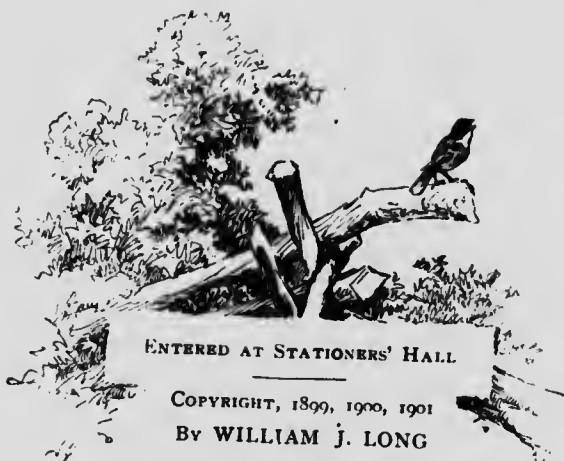
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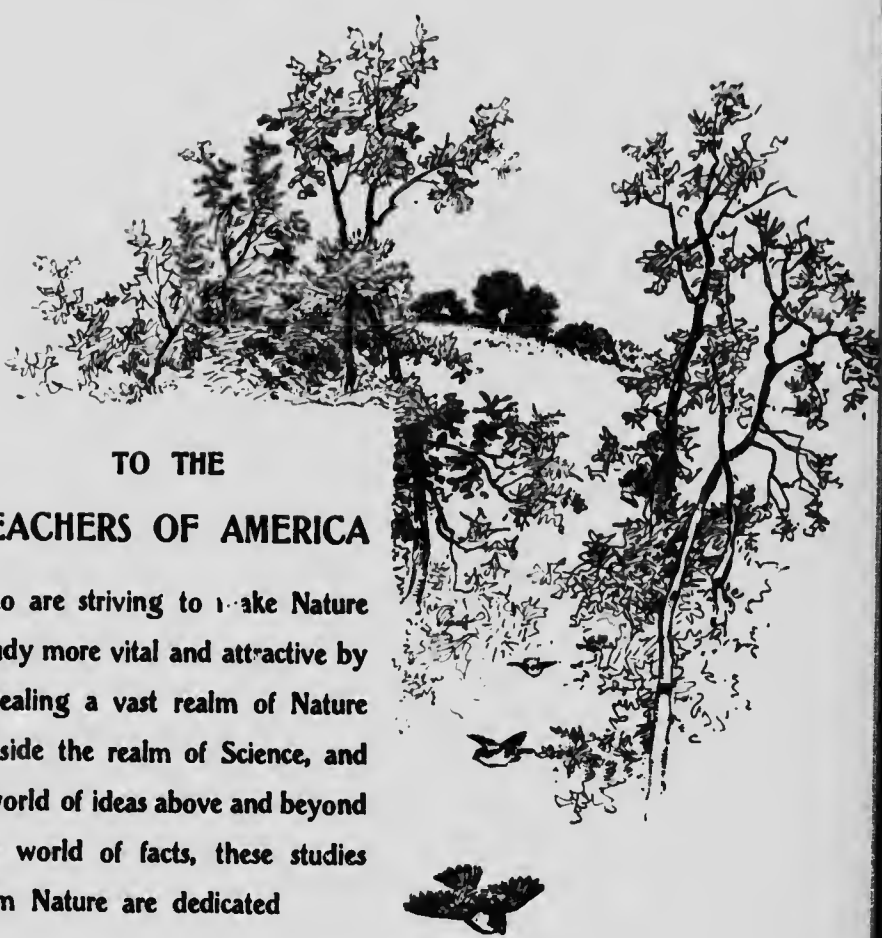


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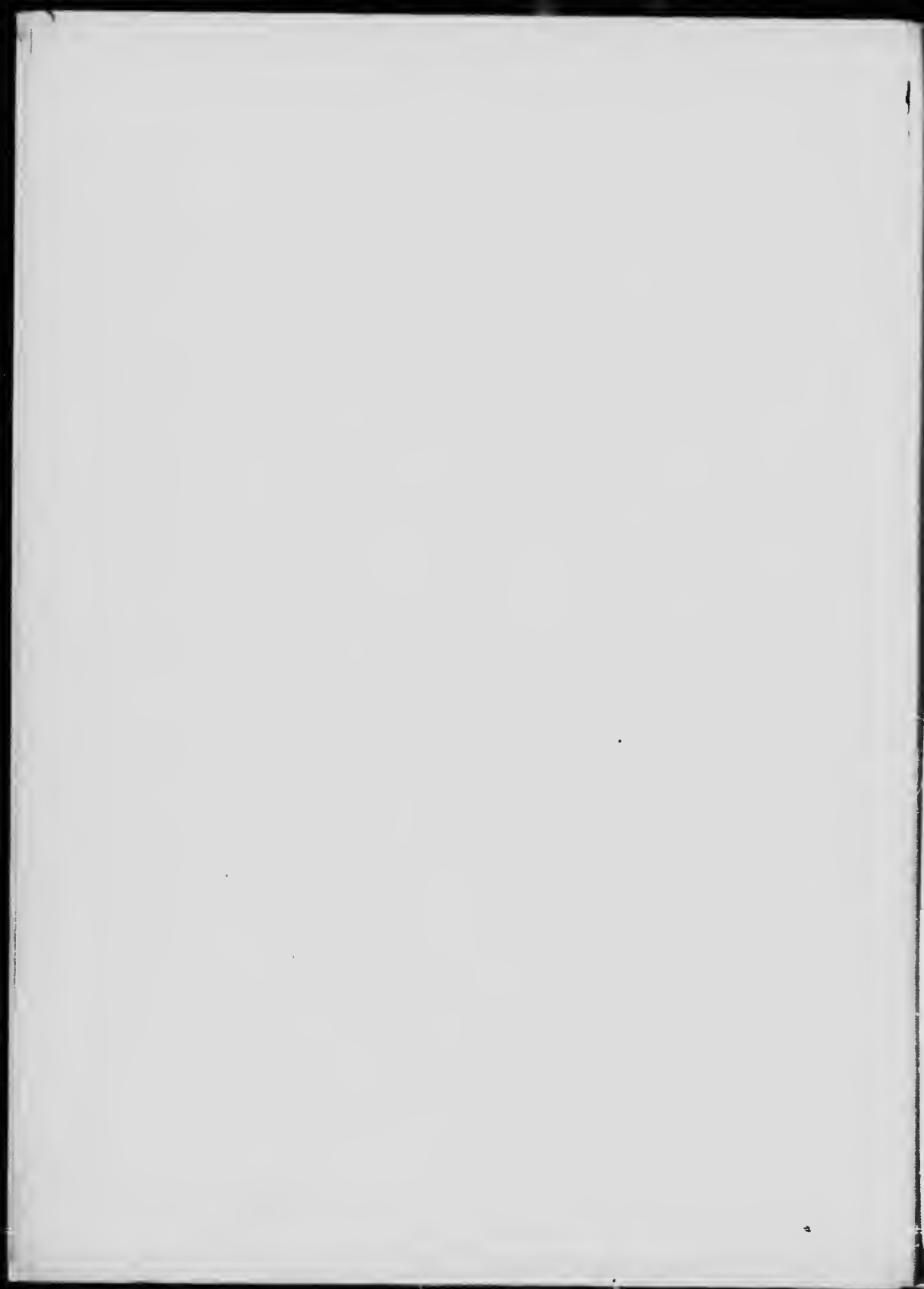
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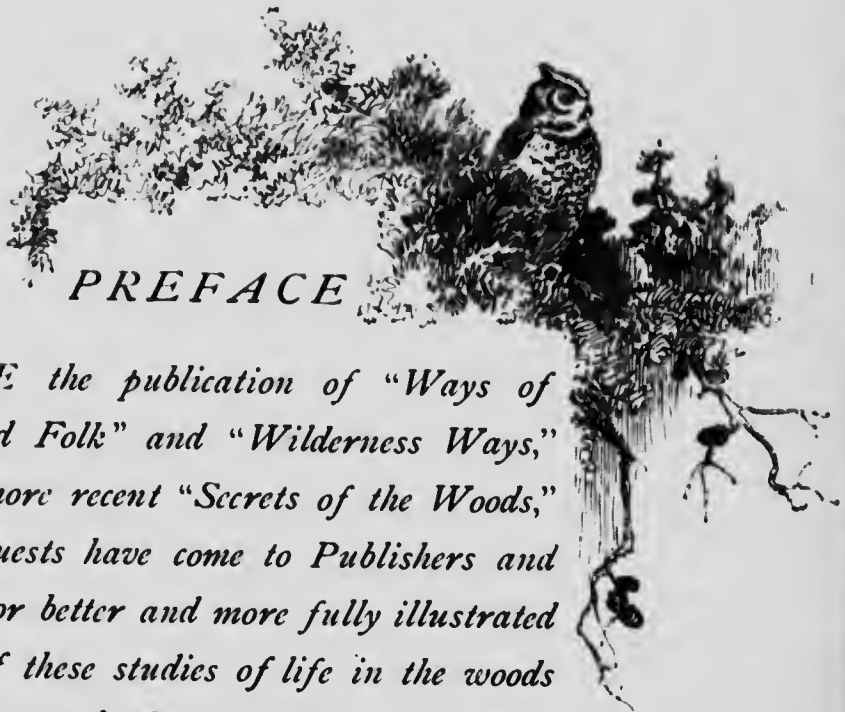


**TO THE  
TEACHERS OF AMERICA**

who are striving to make Nature  
Study more vital and attractive by  
revealing a vast realm of Nature  
outside the realm of Science, and  
a world of ideas above and beyond  
the world of facts, these studies  
from Nature are dedicated





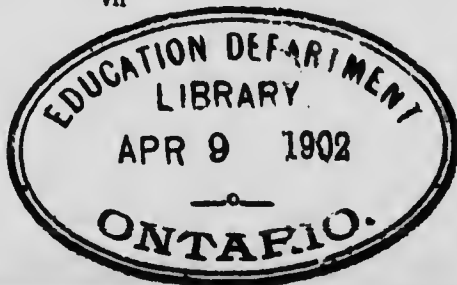


## PREFACE

*SINCE* the publication of "Ways of Wood Folk" and "Wilderness Ways," and the more recent "Secrets of the Woods," many requests have come to Publishers and Author for better and more fully illustrated editions of these studies of life in the woods and fields; and these requests grow more and more numerous as successive editions are printed.

*It is chiefly in answer to this demand that these two volumes, "Beasts of the Field" and "Fowls of the Air," have been prepared. They include most of the previous sketches, with enough new material to give variety*

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and a wider range of acquaintance with the Wood Folk.



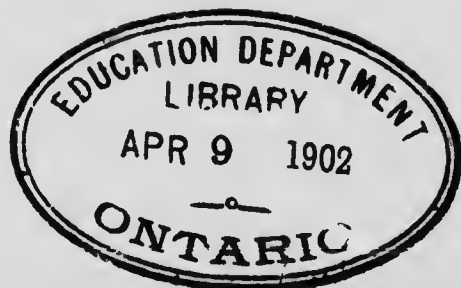
The names used here for birds and beasts were given by the Milicete Indians; the occasional legends referred to have never been written, but were heard by the writer before the camp-fire, in the heart of the wilderness; and the incidents and sketches are true to life, as I have seen it in many years of watching and following the wild things.

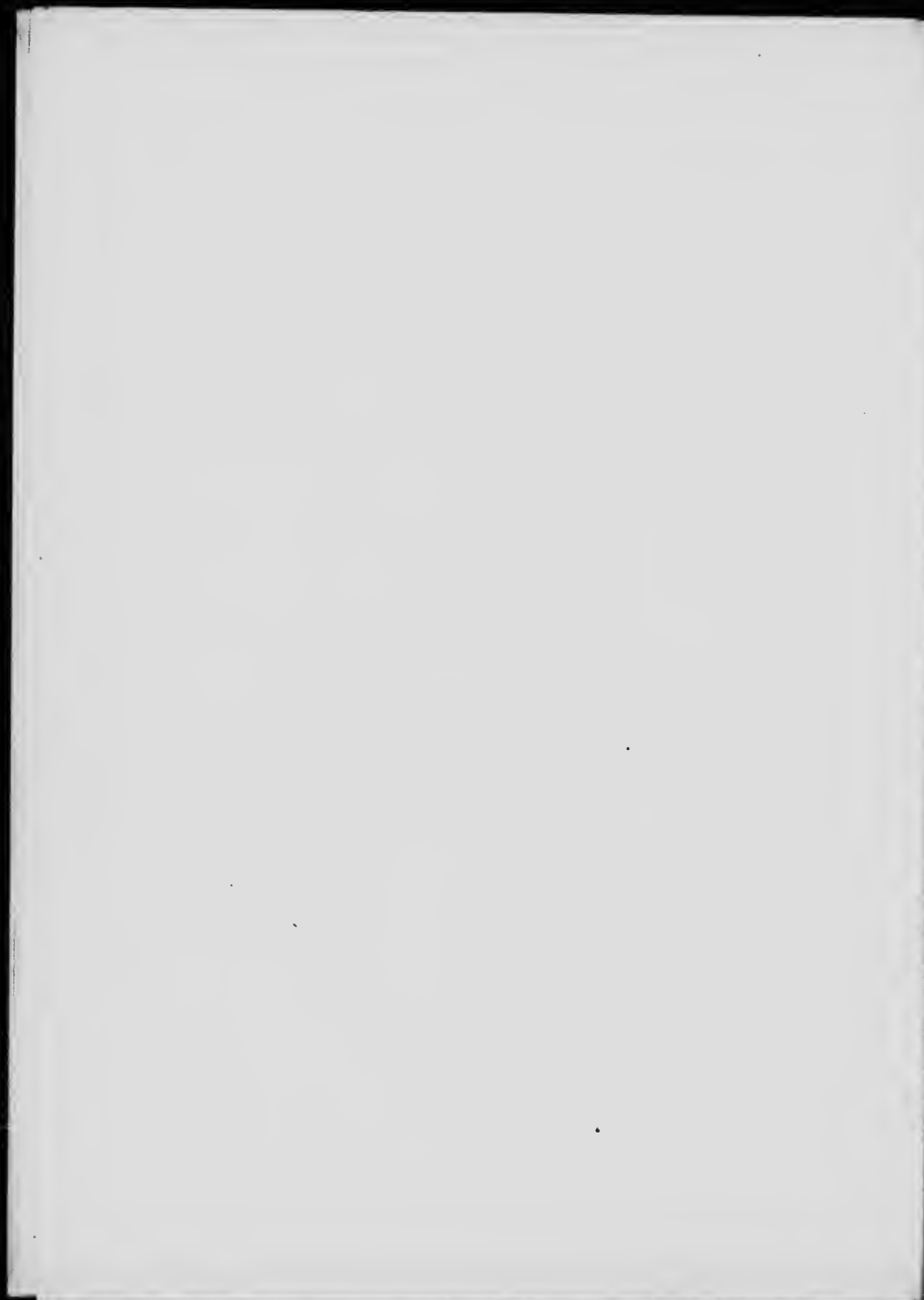
WM. J. LONG.

STAMFORD, CONN.,  
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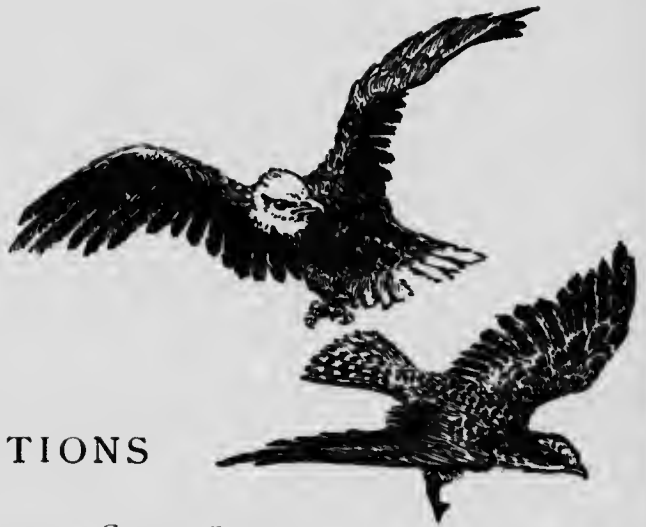
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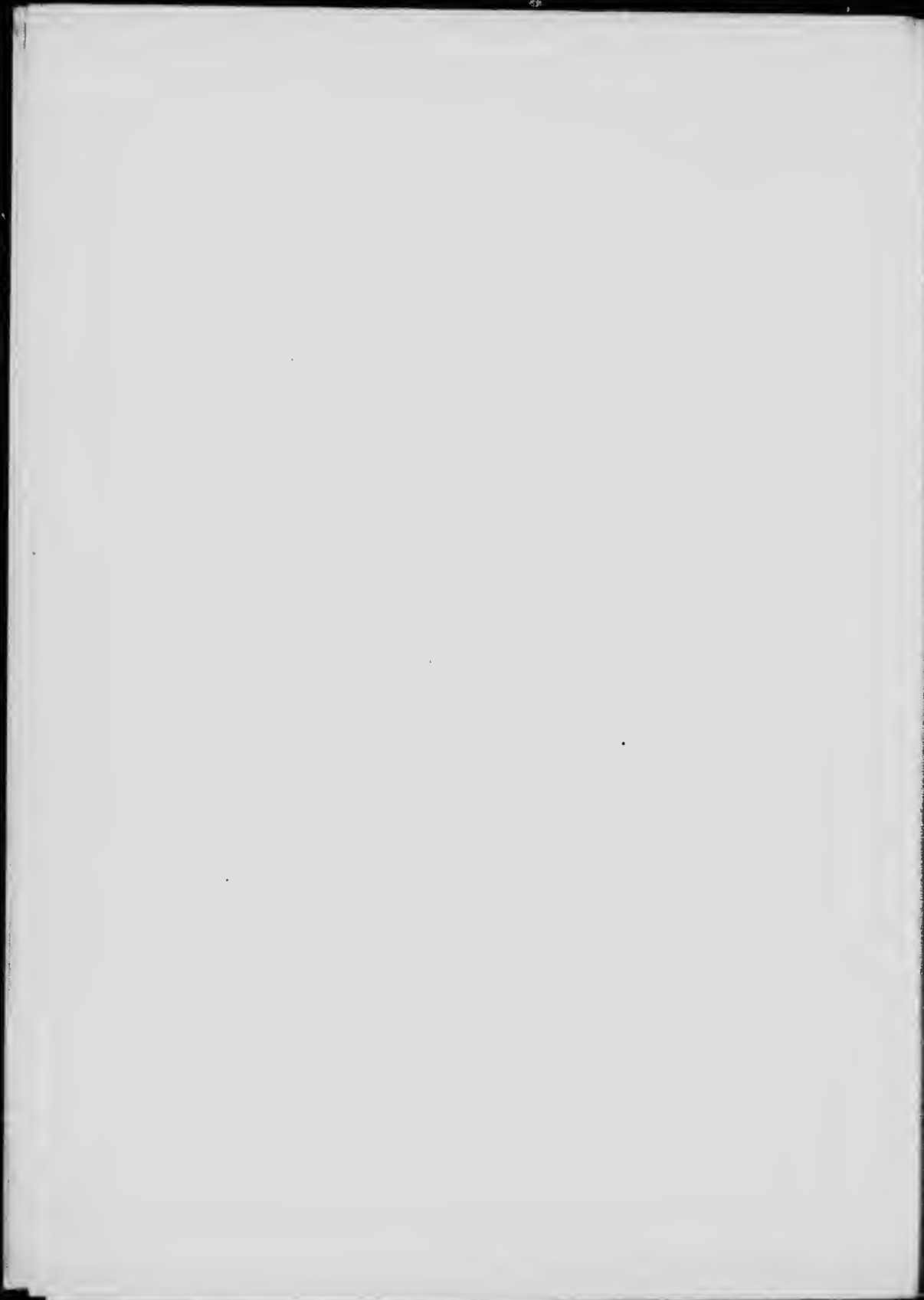


## FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

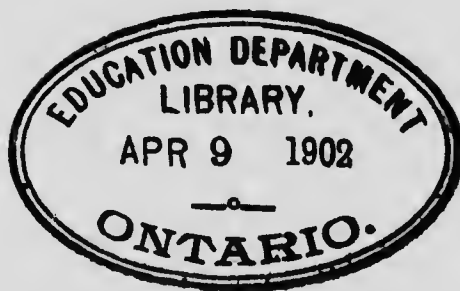


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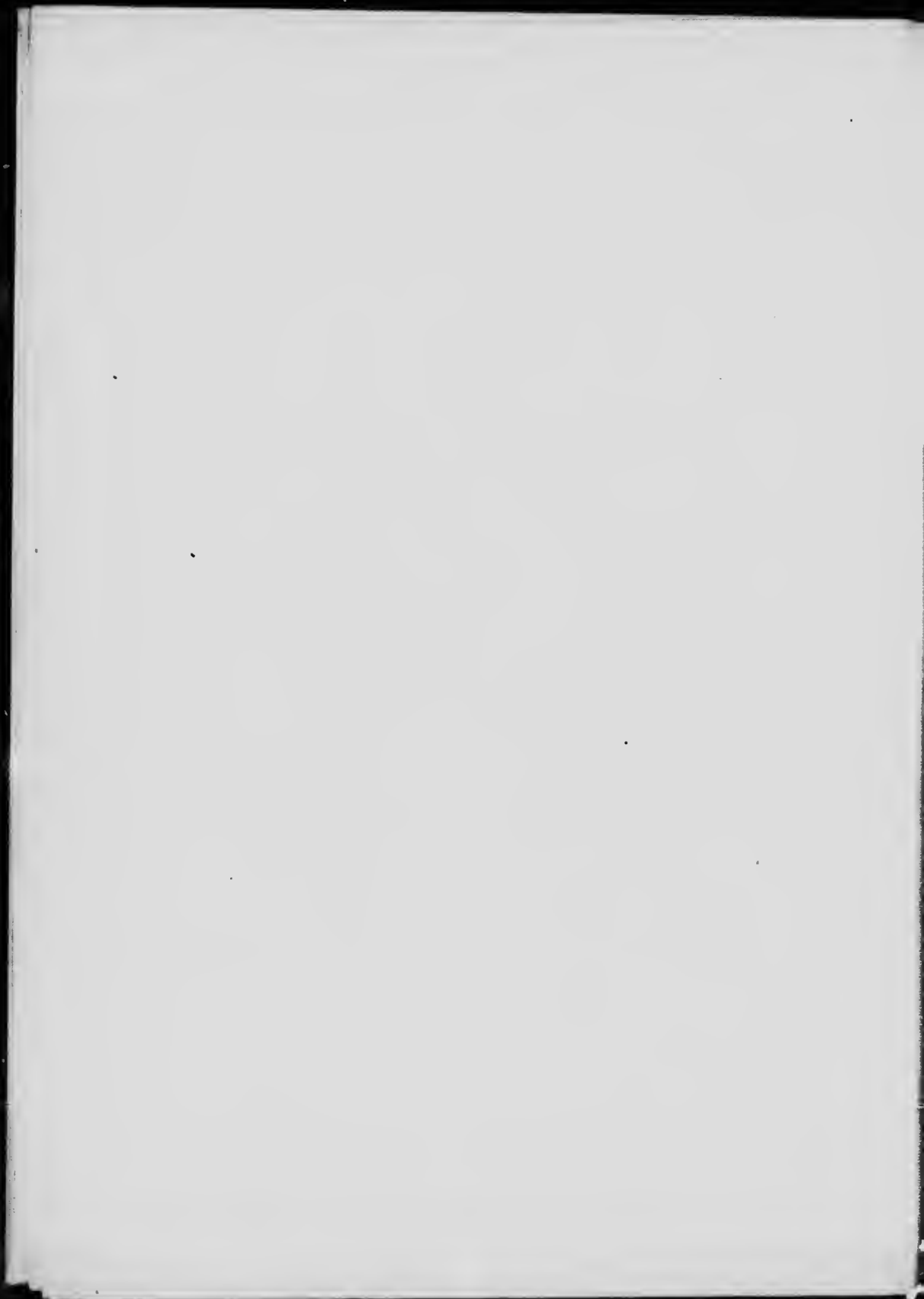




# THE OL' BEECH PA'TRIDGE







# THE OL' BEECH PA'TRIDGE



**O**F ALL the wild birds that still haunt our remaining solitudes, the ruffed grouse — the pa'tridge of our younger days — is perhaps the wildest, the most alert, the most suggestive of the primeval wilderness that we have lost. You enter the woods from the hillside pasture, lounging a moment on the old gray fence to note the play of light and shadow on the birch bolls. Your eye lingers restfully on the wonderful mixture of soft colors that no brush has ever yet imitated, the rich old gold of autumn tapestry the glimmering gray-green of the mouldering stump that the fungi have painted. What a



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giant that tree must have been, generations ago, in its days of strength; how puny the birches that now grow out of its roots! You remember the great canoe birches by the wilderness river, whiter than the little tent that nestled beneath them, their wide bark banners waving in the wind, soft as the flutter of owls' wings that swept among them, shadow-like, in the twilight. A vague regret steals over you that our own wilderness is gone, and with it most of the shy folk that loved its solitudes.

Suddenly there is a rustle in the leaves. Something stirs by the old stump. A moment ago you thought it was only a brown root; now it runs, hides, draws itself erect — *Kwit, kwit, kwit!* and with a whirring rush of wings and a whirling eddy of dead leaves a grouse bursts up, and darts away like a blunt arrow, flint-tipped, gray-feathered, among the startled birch stems. As you follow softly to rout him out again, and to thrill and be startled by his unexpected rush, something of the Indian has come unbidden into your cautious tread. All regret

for the wilderness is vanished ; you are simply glad that so much wildness still remains to speak eloquently of the good old days.

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It is this element of unconquerable wildness in the grouse, coupled with a host of early, half-fearful impressions, that always sets my heart to beating, as to an old tune, whenever a partridge bursts away at my feet. I remember well a little child that used to steal away into the still woods, which drew him by an irresistible attraction while as yet their dim arches and quiet paths were full of mysteries and haunting terrors. Step by step the child would advance into the shadows, cautious as a wood mouse, timid as a rabbit. Suddenly, a swift rustle, a thunderous rush of something from the ground that first set the child's heart to beating wildly, and then reached his heels in a fearful impulse which sent him rushing out of the woods, tumbling headlong over the old gray wall, and scampering halfway across the pasture before he dared halt from the terror behind. And then, at last, another impulse, which always sent the child stealing



*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*

*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*



6 back into the woods again, shy, alert, tense as a watching fox, to find out what the fearful thing was that could make such a commotion in the quiet woods.

And when he found out at last — ah, that was a discovery beside which the panther's kittens are as nothing, as I now think of them. One day in the woods, near the spot where the awful thunder used to burst away, the child heard a cluck and a *kwit-kwit*, and saw a beautiful bird dodging, gliding, halting, hiding in the underbrush, watching the child's every motion. And when he ran forward to put his cap over the bird, it burst away, and then — *whirr! whirr! whirr!* a whole covey of grouse roared up all about him. The terror of it weakened his legs, so that he fell down in the eddy leaves and covered his ears. But this time he knew what it was, at last; in a moment he was up and running, not away, but fast as his little legs could carry him after the last bird that he saw hurtling away among the trees, with a birch branch, touched by his wings, nodding good-by behind him.

There is another association with this same bird that always gives an added thrill to the rush of his wings through the startled woods. It was in the old school by the cross-roads, one sleepy September afternoon. A class in spelling, big boys and little girls, toed a crack in front of the master's desk. The rest of the school droned away on appointed tasks in the drowsy interlude. Suddenly there was a terrific crash, a clattering tinkle of broken glass, a howl from a boy near the window. Twenty knees banged the desks beneath, as twenty boys jumped. Then, before any of us had found his wits, Jimmy Jenkins had jumped over two forms and was down on the floor, in the girls' aisle, gripping something between his knees. —

"I've got him," he announced, with the air of a general.

"Got what?" thundered the master.

"Got a pa'tridge; he's an old buster," said Jimmy. And he straightened up, holding by the legs a fine cock partridge whose stiffening wings still beat his sides spasmodically. He had been scared up in the neighboring

*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*



woods, frightened by some hunter out of his native coverts. When he reached the unknown open places he was more frightened still and, as a frightened grouse always flies straight, he had driven like a bolt through the schoolhouse window, killing himself by the impact.

Rule-of-three and cube-root and the unmapped wilderness of partial-payments have left but scant impression on one of those pupils, at least; but a bird that could wake up a drowsy schoolroom and bring out a living lesson, full of life and interest and the subtile call of the woods, from a drowsy teacher who studied law by night but never his boys by day,—that was a bird to be respected. I have studied him with keener interest ever since.

Yet however much you study the grouse, you learn little, except how wild he is. Occasionally, when you are still in the woods and a grouse walks up to your hiding place, you get a fair glimpse and an idea or two; but he soon discovers you and draws himself up, straight as a string, and watches you for five

minutes without stirring or even winking. Then, outdone at his own game, he glides away. A rustle of little feet on leaves, a faint *kwit-kwit*, with a question in it, and he is gone. Nor will he come back, like the fox, to watch from the other side and find out what you are.

Civilization, in its first advances, is good to the grouse, providing him with an abundance of food and driving away his enemies. Unlike other birds, however, he grows wilder and wilder by nearness to men's dwellings. Once, in the wilderness, when very hungry, I caught two partridges by slipping over their heads a string noose at the end of a pole. Here one might as well try to catch a bat in the twilight as to hope to snare one of our upland partridges by any such invention, or even to get near enough to meditate the attempt.

But there was one grouse—and he the very wildest of all that I have ever met in the woods—who showed me, unwittingly, many bits of his life, and with whom I grew to be well acquainted after a few seasons' watching. All the hunters of the village



*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*

knew him well; and a half-dozen boys, who owned guns and were eager to join the hunters' ranks, had a shooting acquaintance with him. He was known far and wide as "the ol' beech pa'tridge." That he was old no one could deny who knew his ways and his devices; and he was frequently scared up in a beech wood by a brook, a couple of miles out of the village.

Spite of much learned discussion as to different varieties of grouse, due to marked variations in coloring, I think personally that we have but one variety, and that differences in color are due largely to the different surroundings in which they live. Of all birds the grouse is most invisible when quiet, his coloring blends so perfectly with the roots and leaves and tree stems among which he hides. This wonderful invisibility is increased by the fact that he changes color easily. He is darker in summer, lighter in winter, like the rabbit. When he lives in dark woods he becomes a glossy red-brown; and when his haunt is among the birches he is often a decided gray.

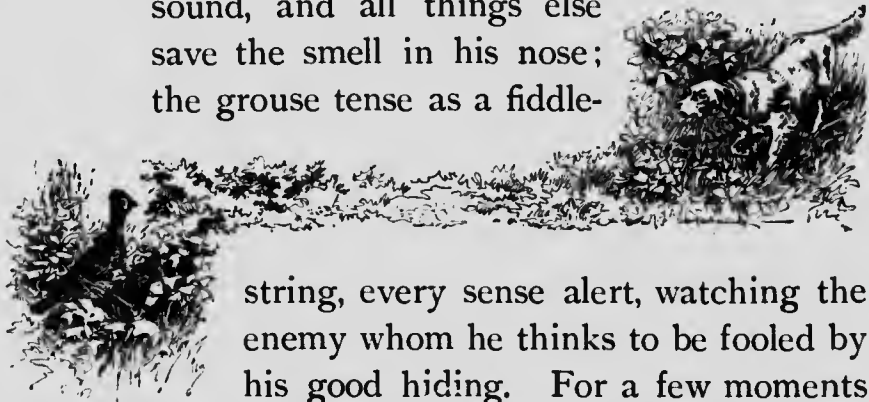
This was certainly true of the old beech partridge. When he spread his tail wide and darted away among the beeches, his color blended so perfectly with the gray tree trunks that only a keen eye could separate him. And he knew every art of the dodger perfectly. When he rose there was scarcely a second of time before he had put a big tree between you and him, so as to cover his line of flight. I don't know how many times he had been shot at on the wing. Every hunter I knew had tried it; and every boy who roamed the woods in autumn had sought to pot him on the ground. But he never lost a feather; and he would never stand to a dog long enough for the most cunning of our craft to take his position.

When a covey of young partridges hear a dog running in the woods, they generally flit to the lower branches of a tree and *kwit-kwit* at him curiously. They have not yet learned the difference between him and the fox, who is the ancient enemy of their kind, and whom their ancestors of the wilderness escaped and tantalized in the same way. But when it is

*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*



an old bird that your setter is trailing, his actions are a curious mixture of cunning and fascination. As Old Don draws to a point, the grouse pulls himself up rigidly by a stump and watches the dog. So both stand like statues; the dog held by the strange instinct which makes him point, lost to sight, sound, and all things else save the smell in his nose; the grouse tense as a fiddle-



string, every sense alert, watching the enemy whom he thinks to be fooled by his good hiding. For a few moments they are motionless; then the grouse skulks and glides to a better cover. As the strong scent fades from Don's nose, he breaks his point and follows. The grouse hears him and again hides by standing still where he is invisible; again Don stiffens into his point, one foot lifted, nose and tail in a straight line, as if he were frozen and could not move.

So it goes on, now gliding through the

coverts, now still as a stone, till the grouse discovers that so long as he is quiet the dog seems paralyzed, unable to move or feel. Then he draws himself up, braced against a root or a tree boll; and there they stand, within twenty feet of each other, never stirring, never winking, till the dog falls from exhaustion at the strain, or breaks it by leaping forward, or till the hunter's step on the leaves fills the grouse with a new terror that sends him rushing away through the October woods to deeper solitudes.

Once, at noon, I saw Old Ben, a famous dog, draw to a perfect point. Just ahead, in a tangle of brown brakes, I could see the head and neck of a grouse watching the dog keenly. Old Ben's master, to test the splendid training of his dog, proposed lunch on the spot. We withdrew a little space and ate deliberately, watching the bird and the dog with an interest that grew keener and keener as the meal progressed, while Old Ben stood like a rock, and the grouse's eye shone steadily out of the tangle of brakes. Nor did either move so much as an eyelid

*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*

while we ate, and Ben's master smoked his pipe with quiet confidence. At last, after a full hour, he whacked his pipe on his boot heel and rose to reach for his gun. That meant death for the grouse; but I owed him too much of keen enjoyment to see him cut down in swift flight. In the moment that the master's back was turned I hurled a knot at the tangle of brakes. The grouse burst away, and Old Ben, shaken out of his trance by the whirr of wings, dropped obediently to the charge and turned his head to say reproachfully with his eyes: "What in the world is the matter with you back there — did n't I hold him long enough?"

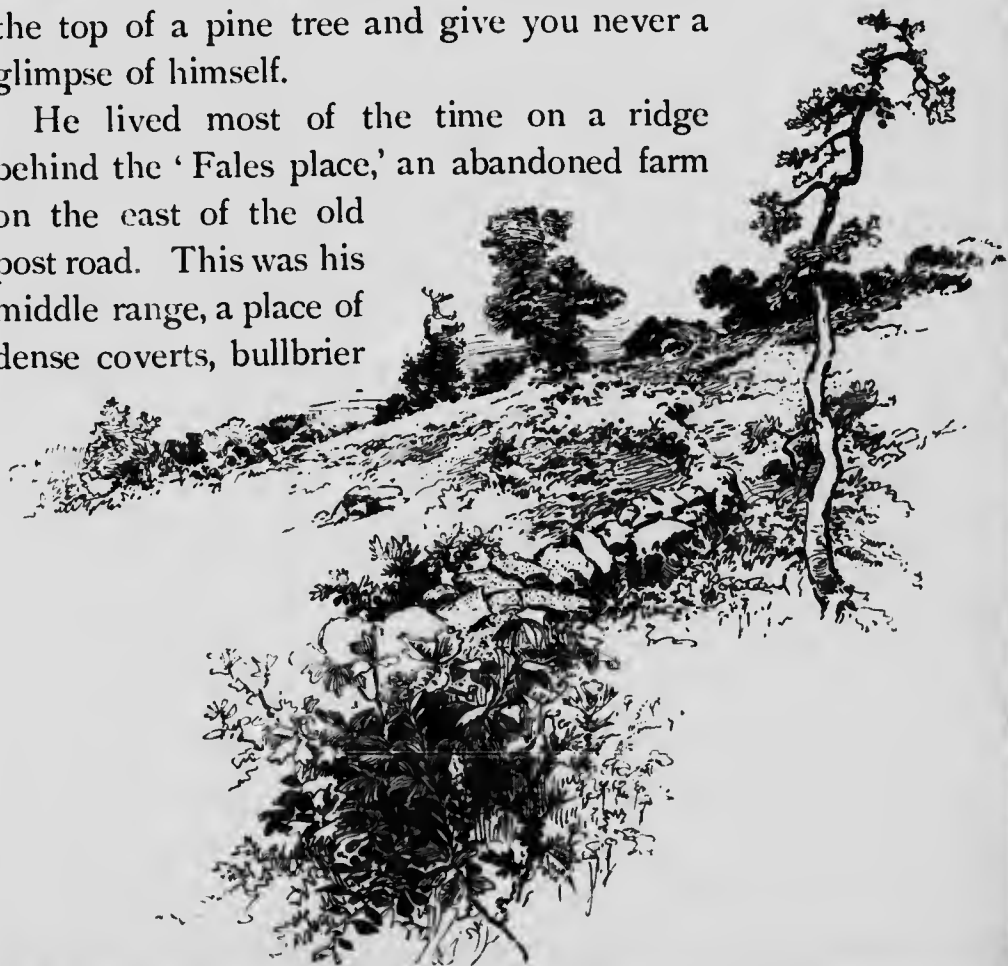
The old beech partridge was a bird of a different mind. No dog ever stood him for more than a second; he had learned too well what the thing meant. The moment he heard the patter of a dog's feet on leaves he would run rapidly, and skulk and hide and run again, keeping dog and hunter on the move till he found the cover he wanted, — thick trees, or a tangle of wild grapevines, — when he would burst out on the farther

side. And no eye, however keen, could catch more than a glimpse of a gray tail before he was gone. Other grouse make short, straight flights, and can be followed and found again; but he always drove away on strong wings for an incredible distance, and swerved far to right or left; so that it was a waste of time to follow him up. Before you found him he had rested his wings and was ready for another flight; and when you did find him, he would shoot away like an arrow out of the top of a pine tree and give you never a glimpse of himself.

He lived most of the time on a ridge behind the 'Fales place,' an abandoned farm on the east of the old post road. This was his middle range, a place of dense coverts, bullbrier

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*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*



*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*

thickets and sunny open spots among the ledges, where you might, with good-luck, find him on special days at any season. But he had all the migratory instincts of a Newfoundland caribou. In winter he moved south, with twenty other grouse, to the foot of the ridge, which dropped away into a succession of knolls and ravines and sunny, well-protected little valleys. Here, fifty years ago, was the farm pasture; but now it had grown up everywhere with thickets and berry patches, and wild apple trees of the birds' planting. All the birds loved it in their season; quail nested on its edges; and you could kick a brown rabbit out of almost any of its decaying brush piles or hollow, moss-grown logs.

In the spring he crossed the ridge northward again, moving into the still, dark woods, where he had two or three wives, with as many broods of young partridges; all of whom, by the way, he regarded with astonishing indifference.

Across the whole range — stealing silently out of the big woods, brawling along the

foot of the ridge and singing through the old pasture — ran a brook that the old beech partridge seemed to love. A hundred times I started him from its banks. You had only to follow it any November morning before eight o'clock, and you would be sure to find him. But why he haunted it at this particular time and season I never found out.

I used to wonder, sometimes, why I never saw him drink. Other birds had their regular drinking places and bathing pools there, and I frequently watched them from my hiding; but though I saw him many times, after I learned his haunts, he never touched the water.

One early summer morning, a possible explanation suggested itself. I was sitting quietly by the brook, at the edge of the big woods, waiting for a pool to grow quiet, out of which I had just taken a trout and in which I suspected there was a larger one hiding. As I waited a mother grouse and her brood — one of the old beech partridge's numerous families for whom he provided nothing — came gliding along the edge of



*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*

the woods. They had come to drink, evidently, but not from the brook. A sweeter draught than that was waiting for their coming. The dew was still clinging to the grass blades; here and there a drop hung from a leaf point, flashing like a diamond in the early light. And the little partridges, gliding, cheeping, whistling among the drooping stems, would raise their little bills for each shining dewdrop that attracted them, and drink it down and run with glad little pipings and gurglings to the next drop that flashed an invitation from its bending grass blade. The old mother walked sedately in the midst of them, now fussing over a laggard, now clucking them all together in an eager, chirping, jumping little crowd, each one struggling to be first in at the death of a fat slug she had discovered on the underside of a leaf; and anon reaching herself for a dewdrop that hung too high for their drinking. So they passed by, within a few yards, a shy, wild, happy little family, and disappeared into the shadow of the big woods.

Perhaps that is why I never saw the old beech partridge drink from the brook. Nature has a fresher draught, of her own distilling, that is more to his tasting.



*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*

Earlier in the season I found another of his families near the same spot. I was stealing along a wood road, when I ran plump upon them, scratching away at an ant hill in a sunny, open spot. There was a wild flurry, as if a whirlwind had struck the ant hill; but it was only the wind of the mother bird's wings, whirling up the dust to blind my eyes and to hide the scampering retreat of her downy brood. Again her wings beat the ground, sending up a flurry of dead leaves, in the midst of which the little partridges jumped and scurried away, so much like the leaves that no eye could separate them. Then the leaves settled slowly and the brood was gone, as if the ground had swallowed them up; while Mother Grouse went fluttering along just out of my reach, trailing a wing as if broken, falling prone on the ground, clucking and *kwittering* and whirling the leaves to draw my attention and bring

*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*



me away from where the little ones were hiding.

I knelt down just within the edge of woods, whither I had seen the last laggard of the brood vanish like a brown streak, and began to look for them carefully. After a time I found one. He was crouched flat on a dead oak leaf, just under my nose, his color hiding him wonderfully. Something glistened in a tangle of dark roots. It was an eye; and presently I could make out a little head there. That was all I could find of the family, though a dozen more were close beside me, under the leaves mostly. As I backed away I put my hand on another before seeing him, and barely saved myself from hurting little sly-boots, who never stirred a muscle, not even when I took away the leaf that covered him and put it back again softly.

Across the pathway was a thick scrub oak, under which I sat down to watch. Ten long minutes passed, with nothing stirring, before Mother Grouse came stealing back. She clucked once — “Careful!” it seemed to say; and not a leaf stirred. She clucked again —

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did the ground open? There they were, a dozen or more of them, springing up from nowhere and scurrying with a thousand cheepings to tell her all about it. So she gathered them all close about her, and they vanished into the friendly shadows.

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*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*

It was curious how jealously the old beech partridge watched over the solitudes where these interesting little families roamed. Though he seemed to care nothing about them, and was never seen near one of his families, he suffered no other cock partridge to come into his woods, or even to drum within hearing. In the winter he shared the southern pasture peaceably with twenty other grouse; and on certain days you might, by much creeping, surprise a whole company of them on a sunny southern slope, strutting and gliding, in and out and round about, with spread tails and drooping wings, going through all the movements of a grouse minuet. Once, in Indian summer, I crept up to twelve or fifteen of the splendid birds, who were going through their curious performance in a little opening among the berry bushes; and

*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*

in the midst of them — more vain, more resplendent, strutting more proudly and clucking more arrogantly than any other — was the old beech partridge.

But when the spring came, and the long rolling drum-calls began to throb through the budding woods, he retired to his middle range on the ridge, and marched from one end to the other, driving every other cock grouse out of hearing, and drubbing him soundly if he dared resist. Then, after a triumph, you would hear his loud drum-call rolling through the May splendor, calling as many wives as possible to share his rich living.

He had two drumming logs on this range, as I soon discovered; and once, while he was drumming on one log, I hid near the other and imitated his call fairly well by beating my hands on a blown bladder that I had buttoned under my jacket. The roll of a grouse drum is a curiously muffled sound; it is often hard to determine the spot or even the direction whence it comes; and it always sounds much farther away than it really is. This

may have deceived the old beech partridge at first into thinking that he heard some other bird far away, on a ridge across the valley, where he had no concern; for presently he drummed again on his own log. I answered it promptly, rolling back a defiance, and also telling any hen grouse on the range that here was another candidate, willing to strut and spread his tail and lift the resplendent ruff about his neck to win his way into her good graces, if she would but come to his drumming log and see him.

Some suspicion that a rival had come to his range must have entered the old beech partridge's head. There was a long silence, in which I could fancy him standing up straight and stiff on his drumming log, listening intently to locate the daring intruder, and holding down his bubbling wrath with difficulty.

Without waiting for him to drum again, I beat out a challenge. The roll had barely ceased when he came darting up the ridge, glancing like a bolt among the thick branches, and plunged down by his own log, where he



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drew himself up with marvelous suddenness to listen and watch for the intruder.

He seemed relieved that the log was not occupied; but he was still full of wrath and suspicion. He glided and dodged all about the place, looking and listening; then he sprang to his log and, without waiting to strut and spread his gorgeous feathers as usual, he rolled out the long call, drawing himself up straight the instant it was done, turning his head from side to side to catch the first beat of his rival's answer. — "Come out, if you dare; drum, if you dare. Oh, you coward!" And he hopped, five or six high, excited hops, like a rooster before a storm, to the other end of the log, and again his quick throbbing drum-call rolled through the listening woods.

Though I was near enough to see him clearly without my field glasses, I could not even then, nor at any other time when I have watched grouse drumming, determine just how the call is given. After a little while the excitement of a suspected rival's presence wore away, and he grew exultant,

thinking that he had driven the rascal out of his woods. He strutted back and forth on the log, trailing his wings, spreading wide his beautiful tail, lifting his crest and his resplendent ruff. Suddenly he would draw himself up; there would be a flash of his wings up and down that no eye could follow, and I would hear a single throb of his drum. Another flash and another throb; then faster and faster, till he seemed to have two or three pairs of wings, whirring and running together like the spokes of a swift-moving wheel, and the drumbeats rolled together into a long call and died away in the woods.

Generally he stood up on his toes, as a rooster does when he flaps his wings before crowing; rarely he crouched down close to the log; but I doubt if he beat the wood with his wings, as is often claimed. Yet the two logs were different; one was dry and hard, the other mouldy and moss-grown; and the drum-calls were as different as the two logs. After a time I could tell by the sound which log he was using at the first beat of his wings; but that, I think, was a matter of



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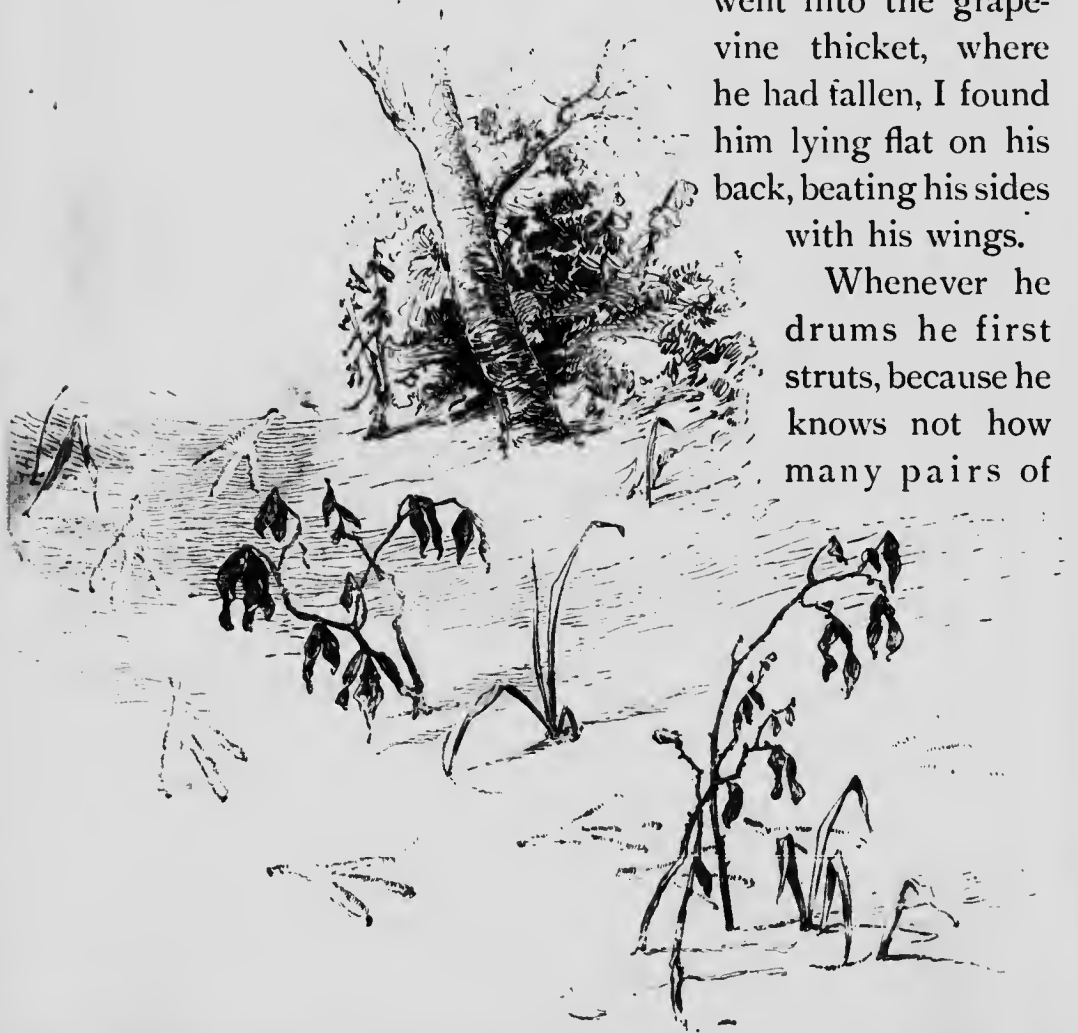
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resonance, a kind of sounding-board effect, and not because the two sounded differently as he beat them. The call is undoubtedly made either by striking the wings together over his back or, as I am inclined to believe, on the down beat against his own sides.

Once I heard a wounded bird give three or four beats of his drum-call; and when I

went into the grapevine thicket, where he had fallen, I found him lying flat on his back, beating his sides with his wings.

Whenever he drums he first struts, because he knows not how many pairs of



bright eyes are watching him shyly out of the coverts. Once, when I had watched him strut and drum a few times, the leaves rustled, and two hen grouse emerged from opposite sides into the little opening where his log was. Then he strutted with greater vanity than before, while the two hen grouse went gliding about the place, searching for seeds apparently, but in reality watching his every movement out of their eye corners, and admiring him to his heart's content.

In winter I used to follow his trail through the snow to find what he had been doing, and what he had found to eat in nature's scarce time. His worst enemies, the man and his dog, were no longer to be feared, being restrained by law, and he roamed the woods with greater freedom than ever. He seemed to know that he was safe at this time; more than once I trailed him up to his hiding and saw him whir away through the open woods, sending down a shower of snow behind him, as if in that curious way to hide his line of flight from my eyes.

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There were other enemies, however, whom no law restrained save the universal wood-laws of fear and hunger. Often I found the trail of a fox crossing his in the snow; and once I followed a double trail, fox over grouse, for nearly half a mile. The fox had struck the trail late the previous afternoon, and followed it to a bullbrier thicket, in the midst of which was a great cedar, in which the old beech partridge roosted. The fox went twice around the tree, halting and looking up, then went straight away to the swamp, as if he knew it was of no use to watch longer.

Rarely, when the snow was deep, I found the place where he went to sleep on the ground. He would plunge down from a tree into the soft snow, driving into it head-first for three or four feet, then turn around and settle down in his white warm chamber for the night. I would find the small hole where he plunged in at evening, and near it the great hole where he burst out when the light waked him. Taking my direction from his wing prints in the snow, I would follow

to find where he lit, and then trace him on his morning wanderings.

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One would think that this might be a dangerous proceeding, sleeping on the ground with no protection but the snow, and a score of hungry enemies prowling about the woods; but the grouse knows well that, when the storms are out, his enemies bide at home, not being able to see or smell, and therefore afraid each one of his own enemies. There is always a truce in the woods during a snow-storm; and that is the reason why a grouse goes to sleep in the snow only while the flakes are still falling. When the storm is over and the snow has settled a bit, the fox will be abroad again; and then the grouse sleeps in the evergreens.

Once, however, the old beech partridge miscalculated. The storm ceased early in the evening, and hunger drove the fox out on a night when, ordinarily, he would have stayed under cover. Some time about day-break, before yet the light had penetrated to where the old beech partridge was sleeping, the fox found a hole in the snow, which told



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him that just in front of his hungry nose a grouse was hidden, all unconscious of danger. I found the spot, trailing the fox, a few hours later. How cautious he was! The sly trail was eloquent with hunger and anticipation. A few feet away from the promising hole he had stopped, looking keenly over the snow to find some suspicious roundness on the smooth surface. Ah! there it was, just by the edge of a juniper thicket. He crouched down, stole forward, pushing a deep trail with his body, settled himself firmly and sprang. And there, just beside the hole his paws had made in the snow, was another hole where the grouse had burst out, scattering snow all over his enemy, who had miscalculated by a foot, and thundered away to the safety and shelter of the pines.

There was another enemy, who ought to have known better, following the old beech partridge all one early spring when snow was deep and food scarce. One day, in crossing the partridge's southern range, I met a small boy,—a keen little fellow, with the instincts of a fox for hunting. He had



Thundered away to the safety and shelter of the pines



always something interesting afoot, — minks, or muskrats, or a skunk, or a big owl, — so I hailed him with joy.

“Hello, Johnnie! what you after to-day — bears?”

But he only shook his head — a bit sheepishly, I thought — and talked of all things except the one that he was thinking about; and presently he vanished down the old road. One of his jacket pockets bulged more than the other, and I knew there was a trap in it.

Late that afternoon I crossed his trail and, having nothing more interesting to do, followed it. It led straight to the bullbrier thicket, where the old beech partridge roosted. I had searched for it many times in vain before the fox led me to it; but Johnnie, in some of his prowlings, had found tracks and signs under a cedar branch, and knew just what they meant. His trap was there, in the very spot where, the night before, the old beech partridge had stood when he jumped for the lowest limb. Corn was scattered liberally about; and a blue jay, that had followed Johnnie, was already fast in the trap,



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caught at the base of his bill. He had sprung the trap in pecking at some corn that was fastened cunningly to the pan by fine wire.

When I took the jay carefully from the trap he played possum till my grip relaxed, when he flew to a branch over my head, squalling and upbraiding me for having anything to do with such abominable inventions.

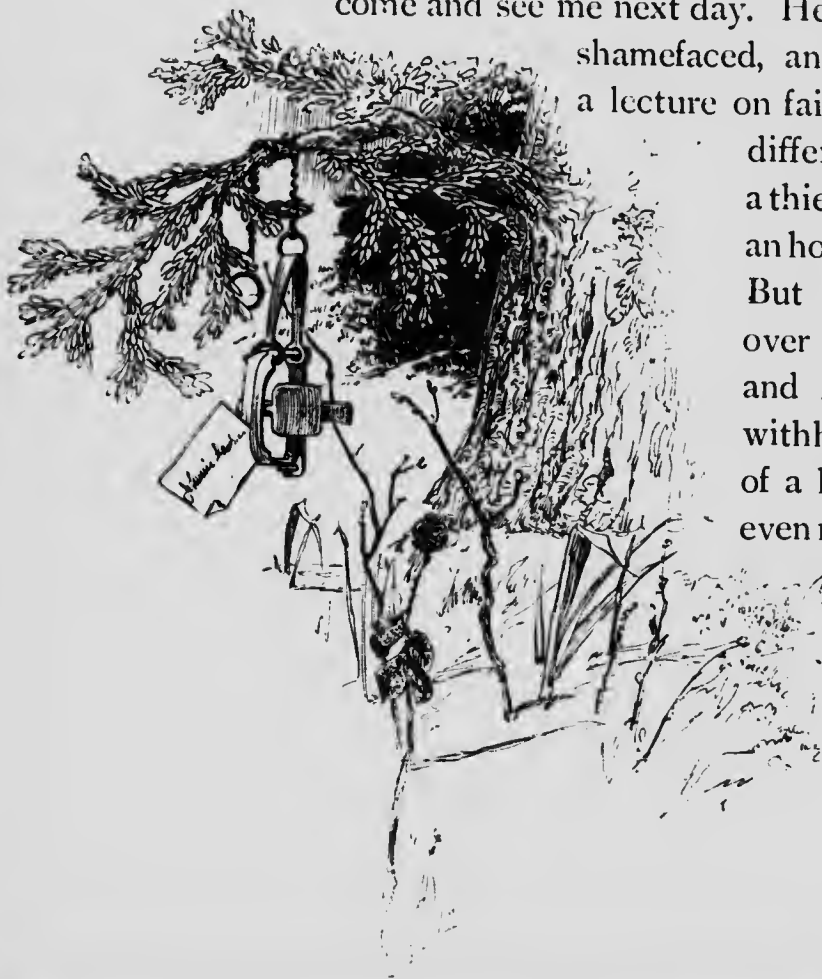
I hung the trap to a low limb of the cedar, with a note in its jaws telling Johnnie to come and see me next day. He came at dusk,

shamefaced, and I read him a lecture on fair play and the

difference between a thieving mink and an honest partridge.

But he chuckled over the blue jay, and I doubted the withholding power of a lecture; so, to even matters, I hint-

ed of an otter slide I had discovered,



and of a Saturday-afternoon tramp together. Twenty times, he told me, he had tried to snare the old beech partridge. When he saw the otter slide he forswore traps and snares for birds; and I left soon after, with hopes for the grouse, knowing that I had spiked the guns of his most dangerous enemy.

Years later I crossed the old pasture again and went straight to the bullbrier tangle. There were tracks of a grouse in the snow, — blunt, triangular tracks that rested lightly on the soft whiteness; showing that nature remembered his necessity and had caused his new snowshoes to grow famously. I hurried to the brook, a hundred memories thronging over me of happy days when the wood folk revealed their secrets. In the midst of them — *Kwit! kwit!* and with a thunder of wings a grouse darted away, wild and gray as the rare bird that lived there years before. And when I questioned a hunter, he said: "That ol' beech pa'tridge? Oh, yes, he's there. He'll stay there, too, till he dies of old age; 'cause you see, Mister, there ain't nobody in these parts spry enough to ketch 'im."



*The Ol' Beech  
Partridge*





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## CLOUD-WINGS THE EAGLE



**H**ERE he is again! here's Old Whitehead, robbing the fish-hawk."

I started up from the little *commoosie* beyond the fire, at Gillie's excited cry, and ran to join him on the shore. A glance out over Caribou Point to the big bay, where innumerable - whitefish were shoaling, showed me another chapter in a long but always interesting story. Ismaquehs, the fish-hawk, had risen from the lake with a big fish, and was doing his best to get away to his nest, where his young ones were clamoring. Over him soared the eagle,

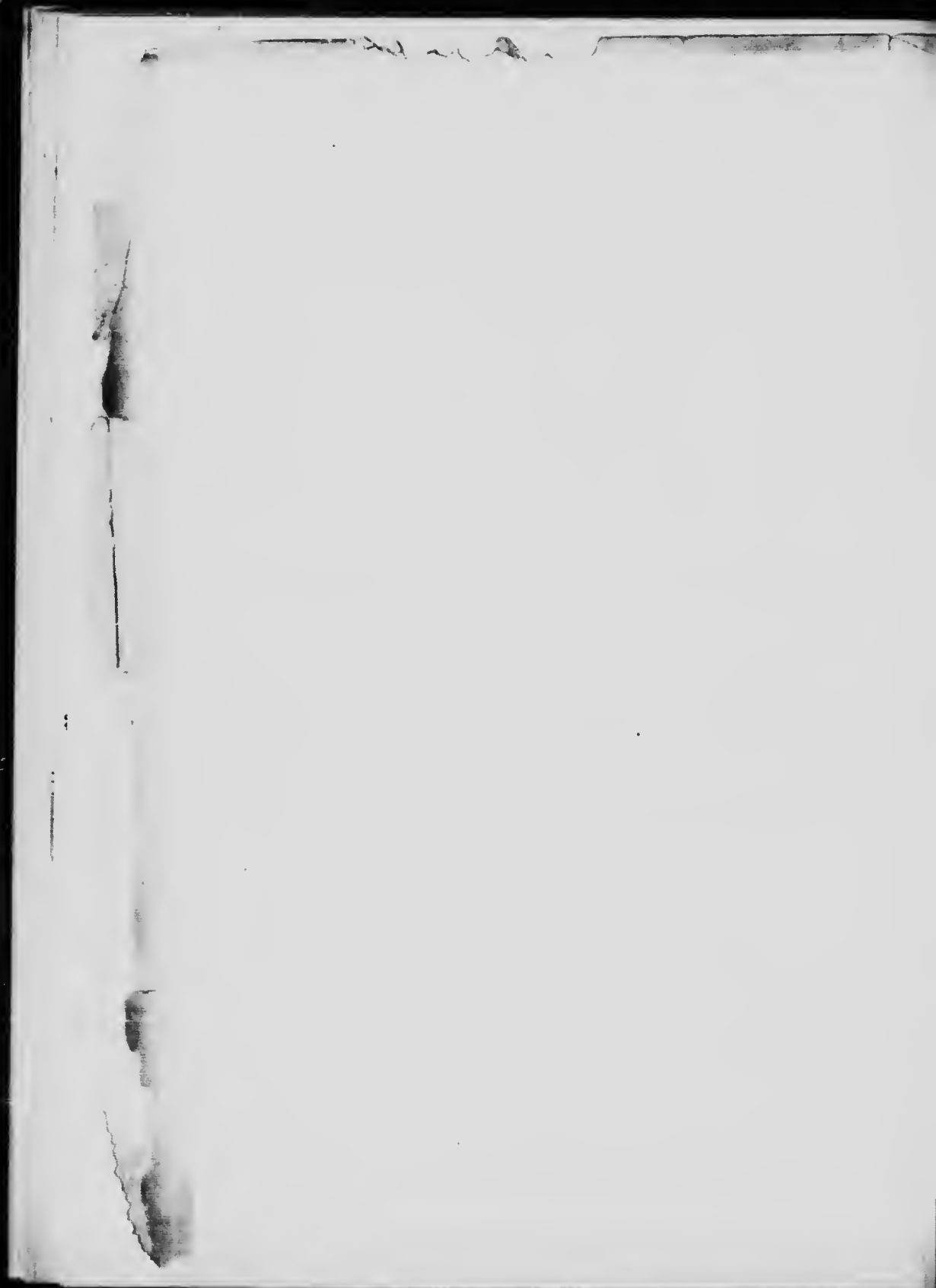
still as fate and as sure, now dropping to flap a wing in Ismaquehs' face, now touching him gently with his great talons, as if to say, "Do you feel that, Ismaquehs? If I grip once 't will be the end of you and your fish together. And what will the little ones do then, up in the nest on the old pine? Better drop him peacefully; you can catch another. — *Drop him!* I say."

Up to that moment the eagle had merely bothered the big hawk's flight, with a gentle reminder now and then that he meant no harm, but wanted the fish which he could not catch himself. Now there was a change, a flash of the king's temper. With a roar of wings he whirled round the hawk like a tempest, bringing up short and fierce, squarely in his line of flight. There he poised on dark broad wings, his yellow eyes glaring fiercely into the shrinking soul of Ismaquehs, his talons drawn back for a deadly strike. And Simmo the Indian, who had run down to join me, muttered: "Cheplahgan mad now. Ismaquehs find-um out in a minute."



There he poised on dark bread wings





But Ismaquehs knew just when to stop. With a cry of rage he dropped, or rather threw his fish, hoping it would strike the water and be lost. On the instant the eagle wheeled out of the way and bent his head sharply. I had seen him fold wings and drop before, and had held my breath at the speed. But dropping was of no use now, for the fish fell faster. Instead he swooped downward, adding to the weight of his fall the push of his strong wings, glancing down like a bolt to catch the fish ere it struck the water, and rising again in a great curve — up and away steadily, evenly, as the king should fly, to his own little ones far away on the mountain.

Weeks before, I had my introduction to Old Whitehead, as Gillie called him, on the Madawaska. We were pushing up river on our way to the wilderness, when a great outcry and the *bang-bang* of a gun sounded just ahead. Dashing round a wooded bend, we came upon a man with a smoking gun, a boy up to his middle in the river, trying to get across, and, on the other side, a



black sheep running about *baaing* at every jump.



“He’s taken the lamb; he’s taken the lamb!” shouted the boy. Following the direction of his pointing finger, I saw Old Whitehead, a splendid bird, rising heavily above the tree-tops across the clearing. Reaching back almost instinctively, I clutched the heavy rifle which Gillie put into my hand and jumped out of the canoe; for with a rifle one wants steady footing. It was a long shot, but not so very difficult. Old Whitehead had his bearings and was moving steadily, straight away. A second after the report of the rifle, we saw him hitch and swerve in the air; then two white quills came floating down, and as he turned we saw the break in his broad white tail. And that was the mark that we knew him by ever afterwards.

That was nearly eighty miles by canoe from where we now stood, though scarcely ten in a straight line over the mountains; for the rivers and lakes we were following doubled back almost to the starting point;

and the whole wild, splendid country was the eagle's hunting ground. Wherever I went I saw him, following the rivers for stranded trout and salmon, or floating high in air where he could overlook two or three wilderness lakes, with as many honest fish-hawks catching their dinners. I had promised the curator of a museum that I would get him an eagle that summer, and so took to hunting the great bird diligently. But hunting was of little use, except to teach me many of his ways and habits; for he seemed to have eyes and ears all over him; and whether I crept like a snake through the woods, or floated like a wild duck in my canoe over the water, he always saw or heard me, and was off before I could get within shooting distance.

Then I tried to trap him. I placed two large trout, with a steel trap between them, at a shallow spot in the river that I could watch from my camp on a bluff, half a mile below. Next day Gillie, who was more eager than I, set up a shout; and running out I saw Old Whitehead standing in the shallows



*Cloud-Wings*  

*The Eagle*



and flopping about the trap. We jumped into a canoe and pushed up river in hot haste, singing in exultation that we had the fierce old bird at last. When we doubled the last point that hid the shallows, there was Old Whitehead, still tugging away at a fish, and splashing the water not thirty yards away. I shall not soon forget his attitude and expression as we shot round the point, his body erect and rigid, his wings half spread, his head thrust forward, eyelids drawn straight, and a strong fierce gleam of freedom and utter wildness in his bright eyes. So he stood, a magnificent creature, till we were almost upon him, — when he rose quietly, taking one of the trout. The other was already in his stomach. He was not in the trap at all, but had walked carefully round it. The splashing was made in tearing one fish to pieces with his claws, and freeing the other from a stake that held it.

After that he would not go near the shallows; for a new experience had come into his

*Cloud-Wings  
the Eagle*

life, leaving its shadow dark behind it. He who was king of all he surveyed from the old blasted pine on the crag's top, who had always heretofore been the hunter, now knew what it meant to be hunted. And the fear of it was in his eyes, I think, and softened their fierce gleam when I looked into them again, weeks later, by his own nest on the mountain.

Simmo entered also into our hunting, but without enthusiasm or confidence. He had chased the same eagle before — all one summer, in fact, when a sportsman whom he was guiding had offered him twenty dollars for the royal bird's skin. But Old Whitehead still wore it triumphantly; and Simmo prophesied for him long life and a natural death. "No use hunt-um dat heagle," he said simply. "I try once an' can't get near him. He see everyt'ing; and wot he don't see, he hear. 'Sides, he kin *feel* danger. Das why he build nest way off, long ways, — O, don' know where." This last with a wave of his arm to include the universe. Cheplahgan, Old Cloud-Wings, he called the bird that had defied him in a summer's hunting.



At first I had hunted him like any other savage, — partly, of course, to get his skin for the curator; partly, perhaps, to save the settler's lambs over on the Madawaska; but chiefly just to kill him, to exult in his death flaps, and to rid the woods of a cruel tyrant. Gradually, however, a change came over me as I hunted; I sought him less and less for his skin and his life, and more and more for himself, to know all about him. I used to watch him by the hour from my camp on the big lake, sailing quietly over Caribou Point, after he had eaten with his little ones and was disposed to let Ismaquehs go on with his fishing in peace. He would set his great wings to the breeze and sit like a kite in the wind, mounting steadily in an immense spiral, up and up, without the shadow of effort, till the eye grew dizzy in following. And I loved to watch him, so strong, so free, so sure of himself—round and round, up and ever up, without hurry, without exertion; and every turn found the heavens nearer and the earth spread wider below. Now head and tail gleam silver white in the sunshine; now

he hangs motionless, a cross of jet that a lady might wear at her throat, against the clear, unfathomable blue of the June heavens— there! he is lost in the blue, so high that I cannot see any more. But even as I turn away he plunges down into vision again, dropping with folded wing straight down like a plummet, faster and faster, larger and larger, through a terrifying rush of air, till I spring to my feet and catch breath, as if I myself were falling. And just before he dashes himself to pieces he turns in the air, head downward, and half spreads his wings, and goes shooting, slanting down towards the lake, then up in a great curve to the tree-tops, where he can watch better what Kakagos, the rare woods-raven, is doing, and what game he is hunting. For that is what Cheplahgan came down in such a hurry to find out about.

Again he would come in the early morning, sweeping up river as if he had already been a long day's journey, with the air of far-away and far-to-go in his onward rush. And if I were at the trout pools, and very







still, I would hear the strong silken rustle of his wings as he passed. At midday I would see him poised over the highest mountain-top northward, at an enormous altitude, where the imagination itself could not follow the splendid sweep of his vision; and at evening he would cross the lake, moving westward into the sunset on tireless pinions — always strong, noble, magnificent in his power and loneliness, a perfect emblem of the great, lonely, magnificent wilderness.

One day as I watched him, it swept over me suddenly that forest and river would be incomplete without him. The thought of this came back to me, and spared him to the wilderness, on the last occasion when I went hunting for his life.

That was just after we reached the big lake, where I saw him robbing the fish-hawk. After much searching and watching I found a great log by the outlet, where Old Whitehead often perched. There was a big eddy hard by, on the edge of a shallow, and he used to sit on the log, waiting for fish to come out where he could wade in and get

them. There was a sickness among the suckers that year (it comes regularly every few years, as among rabbits), and they would come struggling out of deep water to rest on the sand, only to be caught by the minks and fish-hawks and bears and Old White-head, all of whom were waiting and hungry for fish.

For several days I put a big bait of trout and whitefish on the edge of the shallows. The first two baits were put out late in the afternoon, and a bear got them both the next night. Then I put them out in the early morning; and before noon Cheplahgan had found them. He came straight as a string from his watch place over the mountain, miles away, causing me to wonder greatly what strange sixth sense guided him; for sight and smell seemed equally out of the question. The next day he came again. Then I placed the best bait of all in the shallows, and hid in the dense underbrush near, with my gun.

He came at last, after hours of waiting, dropping from above the tree-tops with a

heavy rustling of pinions. As he touched the old log, and spread his broad white tail, I saw and was proud of the gap which my bullet had made, weeks before. He stood there a moment erect and splendid, head, neck and tail a shining white; even the dark brown feathers of his body glistened in the bright sunshine. And he turned his head slowly from side to side, his keen eyes flashing, as if he would say, "Behold, a king!" to Chigwooltz the frog, and Tookhees the wood mouse, and to any other chance-watching creature that might watch him from the underbrush at his unkingly act of feeding on dead fish. Then he hopped down, — rather awkwardly, it must be confessed, for he is a creature of the upper deeps, who cannot bear to touch the earth, — seized a fish, which he tore to pieces with his claws and ate greedily. This I tried to shoot him; but the thought of the wilderness without him was upon me, and I was balked. Then, too, it seemed to me that he had come from ambush when he had come down to earth, where he was at a disadvantage, and when

he clutched some of the larger fish in his talons, and rose swiftly and bore away westward, all desire to kill him was gone. There were a few little Cloud-Wings, it seemed, which I must also find and watch. After that I hunted him more diligently than before, but without my gun. And a curious desire, which I could not account for, took possession of me to touch this untamed, untouched country of the clouds and mountains.

So I did it. There were a few thick bushes growing along one end of the old log on which the eagle rested. Into these I cut a tunnel with my hunting-knife, arranging the tops of the bushes in such a way as to screen me more effectively.

Then I put out my bait, a good two hours before the time of Old White-head's earliest appearance, and crawled into my den to wait.

*Cloud-Wings  
the Eagle*



I had barely settled comfortably into my place, wondering how long human patience could endure the sting of insects and the hot close air without moving or stirring a leaf, when a heavy silken rustle sounded close at hand, and I heard the grip of his talons on the log. There he stood, at arm's length, turning his head uneasily, the light glinting on his white crest, the fierce, untamed flash in his bright eye. Never before had he seemed so big, so strong, so splendid; my heart jumped at the thought of him as our national emblem. I am glad still to have seen that emblem once, and felt the thrill of it.

But I had little time to think; for Cheplahgan was restless. Some instinct seemed to warn him of a danger that he could not see. The moment his head was turned away, I stretched out my arm. Scarcely a leaf moved with the motion, yet he whirled like a flash and crouched to spring, his eyes glaring straight into mine with an intensity that I could scarce endure. Perhaps I was mistaken, but in that swift instant the hard glare



in his eyes seemed to soften with fear, as he recognized me as the one thing in the wilderness that dared to hunt him, the king. My hand touched him fair on the shoulder; then he shot into the air, and went sweeping in great circles over the tree-tops, still looking down at the man, wondering and fearing at the way in which he had been brought into the man's power.

But one thing he did not understand. Standing erect on the log, and looking up at him as he swept over me, I kept thinking, "I did it, I did it, Cheplahgan, Old Cloud-Wings. And I had grabbed your legs, and pinned you down, and tied you in a bag, and brought you to camp, but that I chose to let you go free. And that is better than shooting you. Now I shall find your little ones and touch them too."

For several days I had been watching Old Whitehead's lines of flight, and had concluded that his nest was somewhere in the hills northwest of the big lake. I went there one afternoon, and while confused in the big timber, which gave no outlook in any direction,



I saw, not Old Whitehead, but a larger eagle, his mate undoubtedly, flying straight westward with food towards a great cliff that I had noticed with my glass one day from a mountain on the other side of the lake.

When I went there, early next morning, it was Cheplahgan himself who showed me where his nest was. I was hunting along the foot of the cliff when, glancing back towards the lake, I saw him coming far away, and hid in the underbrush. He passed very near, and following, I saw him standing on a ledge near the top of the cliff. Just below him, in the top of a stunted tree growing out of the face of the rock, was a huge mass of sticks that formed the nest, with a great mother eagle standing by, feeding the little ones. Both birds started away silently when I appeared, but came back soon and swept back and forth over me as I sat watching the nest and the face of the cliff through my glass. No need now of caution. Both birds seemed to know instinctively why I had come, and that the fate of the eaglets lay in my hands, if I could but scale the cliff.

It was scaring business, that three-hundred-foot climb up the sheer face of the mountain. Fortunately the rock was seamed and scarred with the wear of centuries; bushes and stunted trees grew out of countless crevices, which gave me sure footing, and sometimes a lift of a dozen feet or more on my way up. As I climbed, the eagles circled lower and lower; the strong rustling of their wings was about my head continually; they seemed to grow larger, fiercer, every moment, as my hold grew more precarious, and the earth and the pointed tree-tops dropped farther below. There was a good revolver in my pocket, to use in case of necessity; but had the great birds attacked me I should have fared badly; for at times I was obliged to grip hard with both hands, my face to the cliff, leaving the eagles free to strike from above and behind. I think now that had I shown fear in such a place, or shouted, or tried to fray them away, they would have swooped upon me, wing and claw, like furies. I could see it in their fierce eyes as I looked up. But the thought of the times when I



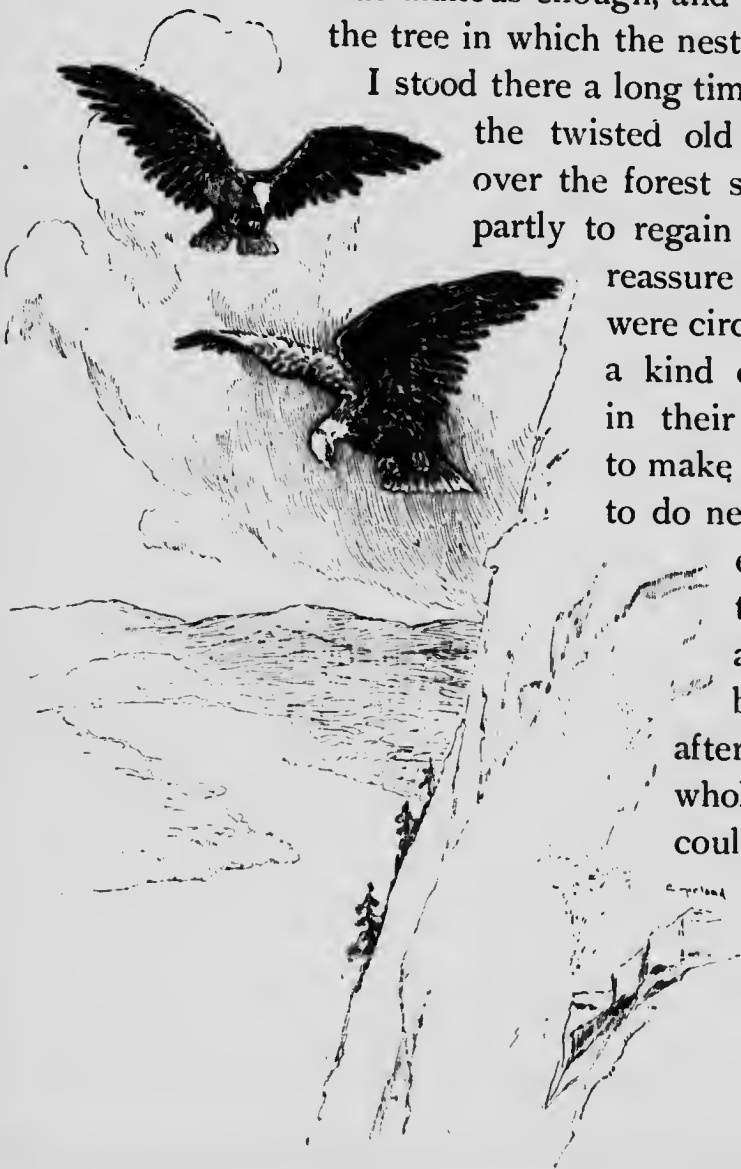


*Cloud-Wings  
The  
Eagle*



had hunted him, especially the thought of that time when I had reached out of the bushes and touched him, was upon Old Whitehead and made him fear. So I kept steadily on my way, apparently giving no thought to the eagles, though deep inside I was anxious enough, and reached the foot of the tree in which the nest was made.

I stood there a long time, my arm clasp-  
ing the twisted old boll, looking out  
over the forest spread wide below,  
partly to regain courage, partly to  
reassure the eagles, which  
were circling very near with  
a kind of intense wonder  
in their eyes, but chiefly  
to make up my mind what  
to do next. The tree was  
easy to climb, but  
the nest—a huge  
affair, which had  
been added to year  
after year—filled the  
whole tree-top, and I  
could gain no foothold



from which to look over and see the eaglets, without tearing the nest to pieces. I did not want to do that; and I doubted whether the mother eagle would stand it. A dozen times she seemed on the point of dropping on my head to tear it with her talons; but always she veered off as I looked up quietly, and Old Whitehead, with the mark of my bullet strong upon him, swept between her and me and seemed to say, "Wait, wait! I don't understand; but he can kill us if he will — and the little ones are in his power." Now he was closer to me than ever, and the fear was vanishing. But so also was the fierceness.

From the foot of the tree the crevice in which it grew led upwards to the right, then doubled back to the ledge above the nest upon which Cheplahgan was standing when I discovered him. The lip of this crevice made a dizzy path that one might follow by moving crabwise, his face to the cliff, with only its roughnesses to cling to with his fingers. I tried it at last; crept up and out twenty feet, and back ten, and dropped with a great breath of relief to a broad ledge



covered with bones and fish scales, the relics of many a savage feast. Below me, almost within reach, was the nest, with two dark, scraggly young birds resting on twigs and grass, with fish, flesh, and fowl in a gory, skinny, scaly ring about them—the most savage-looking household into which I ever looked unbidden.

But even as I looked and won't red, and tried to make out what other game had been furnished the young savages I had helped to feed, a strange thing happened, which touched me as few things ever have among the wild creatures. The eagles had followed me close along the last edge of rock, hoping, no doubt, in their wild hearts that I would slip, and end their troubles, and give my body as food to the young. Now, as I sat on the ledge, peering eagerly into the nest, the great mother bird left me and hovered over her eaglets, as if to shield them with her wings from even the sight of my eyes. But Old Whitehead still circled over me. Lower he came, and lower, till with a supreme effort of daring he folded his wings and dropped

to the ledge beside me, within ten feet, and turned and looked into my eyes. "See," he seemed to say, "we are within reach again. You touched me once; I don't know how or why. Here I am now, to touch or to kill, as you will; only spare the little ones."

A moment later the mother bird dropped to the edge of the nest. And there we sat, we three, with the wonder upon us all, the young eagles at our feet, the cliff above, and, three hundred feet below, the spruce tops of the wilderness reaching out and away to the mountains beyond the big lake.

I sat perfectly still, which is the only way to reassure a wild creature; and soon I thought Cheplahgan had lost his fear in his anxiety for the little ones. But the moment I rose to go he was in the air again, circling restlessly above my head with his mate, the same wild fierceness in his eyes as he looked down. A half-hour later I had gained the top of the cliff and started eastward towards the lake, coming down by a much easier way than that by which I went up. Later I





returned several times, and from a distance watched the eaglets being fed. But I never climbed to the nest again.

One day, when I came to the little thicket on the cliff where I used to lie and watch the nest through my glass, I found that one eaglet was gone. The other stood on the edge of the nest, looking down fearfully into the abyss, whither, no doubt, his bolder nest-mate had flown, and calling disconsolately from time to time. His whole attitude showed plainly that he was hungry and cross and lonesome. Presently the mother eagle came swiftly up from the valley, and there was food in her talons. She came to the edge of the nest, hovered over it a moment, so as to give the hungry eaglet a sight and smell of food, then went slowly down to the valley, taking the food with her, telling the little one in her own way to come and he should have it. He called after her loudly from the edge of the nest, and spread his wings a dozen times to follow. But the plunge was too awful; his heart failed him; and he settled back in the nest, and pulled



his head down into his shoulders, and shut his eyes, and tried to forget that he was hungry. The meaning of the little comedy was plain enough. She was trying to teach him to fly, telling him that his wings were grown and the time was come to use them; but he was afraid.

In a little while she came back again, this time without food, and hovered over the nest, trying every way to induce the little one to leave it. She succeeded at last, when with a desperate effort he sprang upward and flapped to the ledge above, where I had sat and watched him with Old Whitehead. Then, after surveying the world gravely from his new place, he flapped back to the nest, and turned a deaf ear to all his mother's assurances that he could fly just as easily to the tree-tops below, if he only would.

Suddenly, as if discouraged, she rose well above him. I held my breath, for I knew what was coming. The little fellow stood on the edge of the nest, looking down at the plunge which he dared not take. There was a sharp cry from behind, which made him



alert, tense as a watch-spring. The next instant the mother eagle had swooped, striking the nest at his feet, sending his support of twigs and himself with them out into the air together.

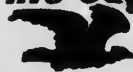
He was afloat now, afloat on the blue air in spite of himself, and flapped lustily for life. Over him, under him, beside him hovered the mother on tireless wings, calling softly that she was there. But the awful fear of the depths and the lance tops of the spruces was upon the little one; his flapping grew more wild; he fell faster and faster. Suddenly — more in fright, it seemed to me, than because he had spent his strength — he lost his balance and tipped head downward in the air. It was all over now; he folded his wings to be dashed in pieces among the trees. Then like a flash the old mother eagle shot under him; his despairing feet touched her broad shoulders, between her wings. He righted himself, rested an instant, found his head; then she dropped like a shot from under him, leaving him to come down on his own wings. A handful of feathers,

torn out by his claws, hovered slowly down after them.

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It was all the work of an instant before I lost them among the trees far below. And when I found them again with my glass, the eaglet was in the top of a great pine, and the mother was feeding him.

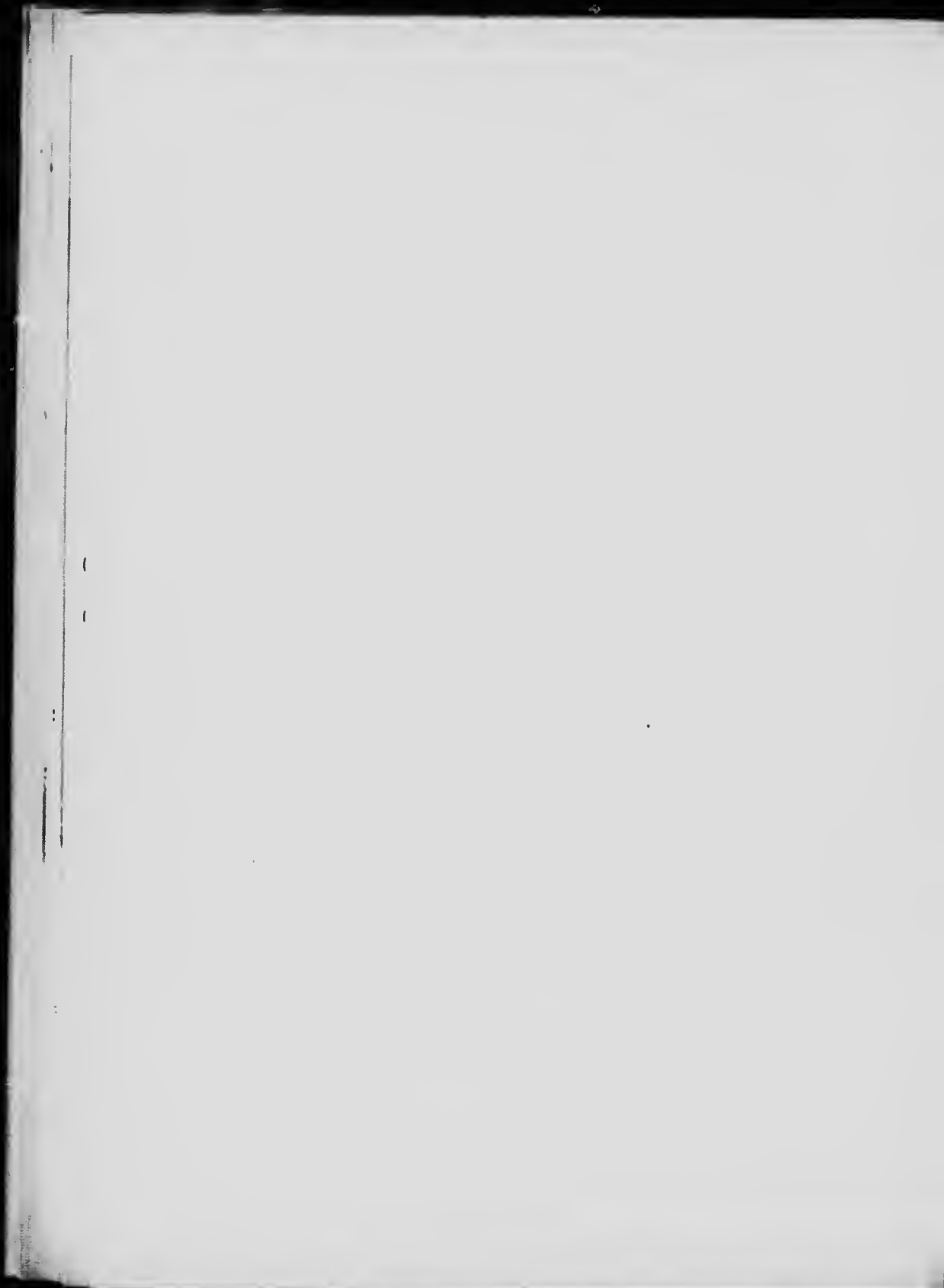
*Cloud-Wings  
the Eagle*



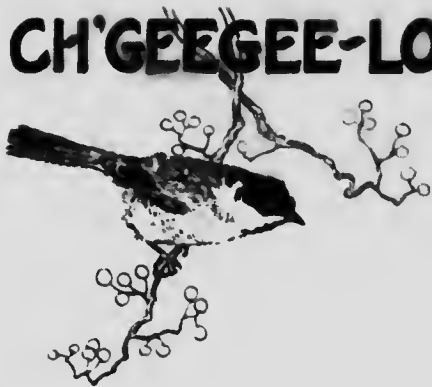
And then, standing there alone in the great wilderness, it flashed upon me for the first time just what the wise old prophet meant; though he wrote long ago in a distant land, and another than Cloud-Wings had taught her little ones, all unconscious of the kindly eyes that watched out of a thicket: "As the eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, — so the Lord."

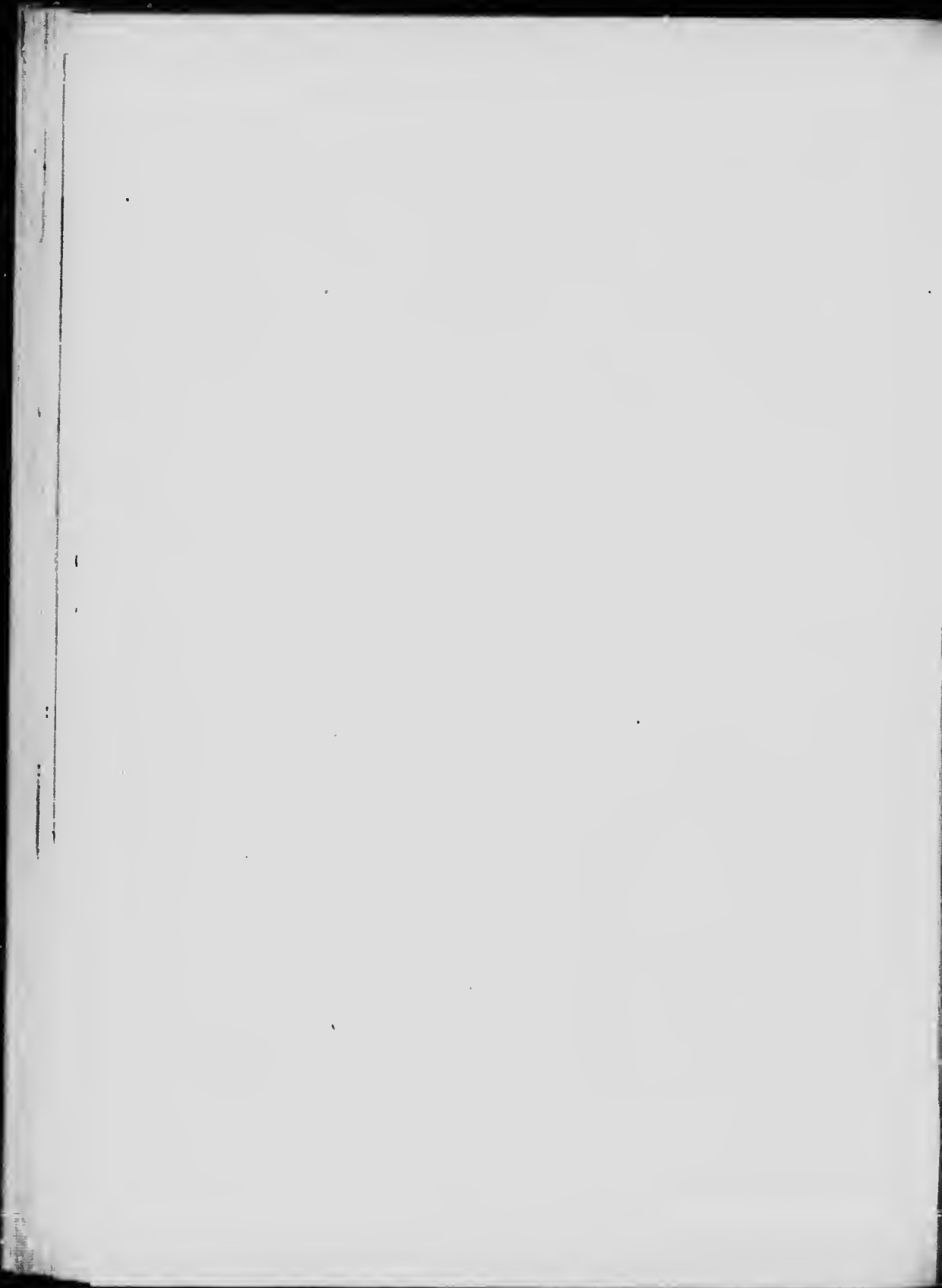






# CH'GEEGEE-LOKH-SIS





## CH'GEEGEE-LOKH-SIS



**T**HAT is the name which the northern Indians give to the black-capped titmouse, or chickadee. "Little Friend Ch'geegee" is what it means; for the Indians, like everybody else who knows Chickadee, are fond of this cheery little brightener of the northern woods. The first time I asked Simmo what

*Ch'geeg'ee-lokh-sis*

his people called the bird, he answered with a smile. Since then I have asked other Indians; and always a smile, a pleased look lit up the dark grim faces as they told me. It is another tribute to the bright little bird's influence.

Chickadee wears well. He is not in the least a creature of moods. You step out of your door some bright morning, and there he is among the shrubs, flitting from twig to twig; now hanging head down from the very tip to look into a terminal bud; now winding upward about a branch, looking industriously into every crevice. An insect must hide well to escape those bright eyes. He is helping you raise your plants. He looks up brightly as you approach, hops fearlessly down and looks at you with frank, innocent eyes. *Chick a dee dee dee dee!* *Tsic a de-e-e?* — this last with a rising inflection, as if he were asking how you were, after he had said good-morning. Then he turns to his insect hunting again; for he never wastes more than a moment talking. But he twitters sociably as he *wirks*.

You meet him again, in the depths of the

wilderness. The smoke of your camp-fire has hardly risen to the spruce tops, when close beside you sounds the same cheerful greeting and inquiry for your health. There he is on the birch twig, bright and happy and fearless! He comes down by the fire to see if anything has boiled over, which he may dispose of. He picks up gratefully the crumbs you scatter at your feet. He trusts you. — See! he rests a moment on the finger you extend, looks curiously at the nail, and sounds it with his bill to see if it shelters any harmful insect. Then he goes back to his birch twigs.

On summer days he never overflows with the rollicksomeness of bobolink and oriole, but takes his abundance in quiet contentment. I suspect it is because he works harder winters, and his enjoyment is deeper than theirs. In winter, when the snow lies deep, he is the life of the forest. He calls to you from the edges of the bleak caribou barrens, and his greeting somehow suggests the May. He comes into your rude bark camp, and eats of your simple fare, and

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leaves a bit of sunshine behind him. He goes with you, as you force your way heavily through the fir thickets on snowshoes. He is hungry, perhaps, like you, but his note is none the less cheery and hopeful.

When the sun shines hot in August, he finds you lying under the alders, with the lake breeze in your face, and he opens his eyes wide and says: "*Tsic a dee-e-e?* I saw you last winter. Those were hard times. But it's good to be here now." And when the rain pours down, and the woods are drenched, and camp life seems beastly altogether, he appears suddenly with greeting cheery as the sunshine. "*Tsic a de-e-e-e?* Don't you remember yesterday? It rains, to be sure, but the insects are plenty, and to-morrow the sun will shine." His cheerfulness is contagious. Your thoughts are better than before he came.

Really, he is a wonderful little fellow; there is no end to the good he does. Again and again I have seen a man grow better tempered or more cheerful, without knowing why he did so, just because Chickadee

stopped a moment to be cheery and sociable. I remember once when a party of four made camp after a driving rain-storm. Everybody was wet; everything soaking. The lazy man had upset a canoe, and all the dry clothes and blankets had just been fished out of the river. Now the lazy man stood before the fire, looking after his own comfort. The other three worked like beavers, making camp. They were in ill humor, cold, wet, hungry, irritated. They said nothing.

A flock of chickadees came down with sunny greetings, fearless, trustful, never obtrusive. They looked innocently into human faces and pretended that they did not see the irritation there. "*Tsic a dee*. I wish I could help. Perhaps I can. *Tsic a dee-e-e?*" — with that gentle, sweetly insinuating up-slide at the end. Somebody spoke, for the first time in half an hour, and it was not a growl. Presently somebody whistled — a wee little whistle; but the tide had turned. Then somebody laughed. "'Pon my word," he said, hanging up his wet





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clothes before the fire, "I believe those chickadees make me feel good-natured. Seem kind of cheery, you know, and the crowd needed it."

And Ch'geegee, picking up his cracker crumbs, did not act at all as if he had done most to make camp comfortable.

There is another way in which he helps, a more material way. Millions of destructive insects live and multiply in the buds and tender bark of trees. Other birds never see them; but Chickadee and his relations leave never a twig unexplored. His bright eyes find the tiny eggs hidden in the buds; his keen ears hear the larvæ feeding under the bark, and a blow of his bill uncovers them in their mischief-making. His services of this kind are enormous, though rarely acknowledged.

Chickadee's nest is always neat and comfortable and interesting, just like himself. It is a rare treat to find it. He selects an old knot-hole, generally on the sheltered side of a dry limb, and chisels a deep tunnel through the heart of it. In the dry wood at the

bottom he makes a little round pocket and lines it with the very softest material. When one finds such a nest, with five or six white eggs delicately touched with pink, and a pair of chickadees gliding about, half fearful, half trustful, it is altogether such a beautiful little spot that I know hardly a boy who would be mean enough to disturb it.

One thing about the nests has always puzzled me. The soft lining has generally more or less rabbit fur. Sometimes, indeed, there is nothing else, and a softer nest one could not wish to see. But where does he get it? He would not, I am sure, pull it out of Br'er Rabbit, as the crow sometimes pulls wool from the sheep's backs. Are his eyes bright enough to find it, hair by hair, where the wind has blown it, down among the leaves? If so, it must be slow work; but Chickadee is very patient. Sometimes, in spring, you may surprise him on the ground, where he never goes for food; but at such times he is always shy, and flits up among the birch twigs, and twitters, and goes through an astonishing gymnastic performance, to hold



*Ch'geegee-lokh-sis*

your attention and make you forget that you caught him fur hunting. That is because you are near his nest.

Once, after such a performance, I pretended to go away; but I only hid in a pine thicket. Chickadee listened awhile, then hopped down to the ground, picked up something quickly, and flew away. It was the lining for his nest near by. He had dropped it when I surprised him, so that I should not suspect him of nest-building.

Such a bright, helpful little fellow should have never an enemy in the world; and I think he has to contend against fewer than most birds. The shrike is his worst enemy, the swift swoop of his cruel beak being always fatal in a flock of chickadees. Fortunately the shrike is rare with us; one seldom finds his nest, with poor Ch'geegee impaled on a sharp thorn near by, surrounded by a varied lot of ugly beetles. The owl sometimes hunts him at night; but he sleeps in the thick pine shrubs, close up against a branch, with the pine needles all about him, making it very dark; and what with the darkness,

and the needles to stick in his eyes, the owl generally gives up the search and hunts in more open woods.

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*Chigeegee-lokh-sis*



Sometimes the hawks try to catch him, but it takes a very quick and a very small pair of wings to follow Chickadee. Once I was watching him hanging, head down, from an oak twig to which the dead leaves were clinging; for it was winter. Suddenly there was a rush of air, a flash of mottled wings and fierce yellow eyes and cruel claws. Chickadee whisked out of sight under a leaf. The hawk passed on, brushing his pinions. A brown feather floated down among the oak leaves. Then Chickadee was hanging, head down, just where he was before. "*Tsic a dee?* Did n't I fool him!" he seemed to say. He had just gone round his twig, and under a leaf, and back again; and the danger was over. When a hawk misses like that he never strikes again.

Boys generally have a kind of sympathetic liking for Chickadee. They may be cruel or thoughtless to other birds, but seldom so to him. He seems somehow like themselves.

*Chigeepsee-lokh-sis*

Two barefoot boys with bows and arrows were hunting, one September day, about the half-grown thickets of an old pasture. The older was teaching the younger how to shoot. A robin, a red squirrel, and two or three sparrows were stowed away in their jacket pockets; a brown rabbit hung from the older boy's shoulder. Suddenly the younger raised his bow and drew the arrow back to its head. Just in front a chickadee hung and twittered among the birch twigs. But the older boy seized his arm.

"Don't shoot — don't shoot him!" he said.

"But why not?"

"'Cause you must n't — you must never kill a chickadee."



And the younger, influenced more by a certain mysterious shake of the head than by the words, slacked his bow cheerfully; and with a last wide-eyed look at the little gray bird that twittered and swung so fearlessly near them, the two boys went on with their hunting.

No one ever taught the older boy to discriminate between a chickadee and other

birds; no one else ever instructed the younger. Yet somehow both felt, and still feel after many years, that there is a difference. It is always so with boys. They are friends of whatever trusts them and is fearless. Chickadee's own personality, his cheery ways and trustful nature had taught them, though they knew it not. And among all the boys of that neighborhood there is still a law, which no man gave, of which no man knows the origin, a law as unalterable as that of the Medes and Persians: *Never kill a chickadee.*

If you ask the boy there who tells you the law, "Why not a chickadee as well as a sparrow?" he shakes his head as of yore, and answers dogmatically: "'Cause you must n't."

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#### CHICKADEE'S SECRET

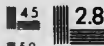
If you meet Chickadee in May with a bit of rabbit fur in his mouth, or if he seem preoccupied or absorbed, you may know that he is building a nest, or has a wife and children near by to take care of. If you know





# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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*Ch'geegee-lokh-sis*

him well, you may even feel hurt that Little Friend Ch'geegee, who shared your camp and fed from your dish last winter, should this spring seem just as frank, yet never invite you to his camp, or should even lead you away from it. But the soft little nest in the old knot-hole is the one secret of Chickadee's life; and the little deceptions by which he tries to keep it are at times so childlike, so transparent, that they are even more interesting than his frankness.

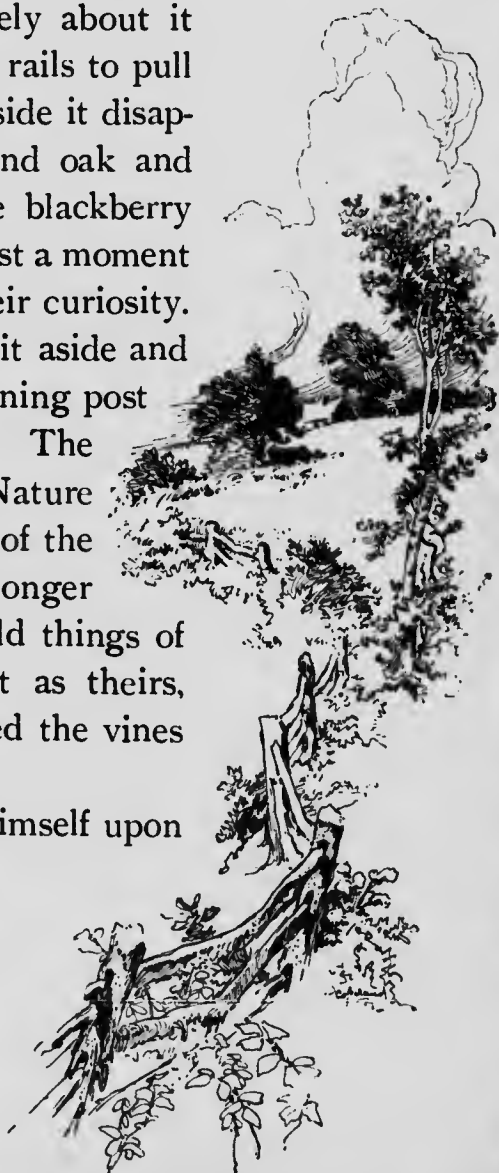
One afternoon in May I was hunting, without a gun, about an old deserted farm among the hills—one of those sunny places that the birds love, because some sense of the human beings who once lived there still clings to the half-wild fields and gives protection. The day was bright and warm. The birds were everywhere, flashing out of the pine thickets into the birches in all the joyfulness of nest-building, and filling the air with life and melody. It is poor hunting to move about at such a time. Either the hunter or his game must be still. Here the birds were moving constantly; one might

see more of them and their ways by just keeping quiet and invisible.

I sat down on the edge of a pine thicket, and became as much as possible a part of the old stump which was my seat. In front of me an old rail fence wandered across the deserted pasture, struggling against the blackberry vines, which grew profusely about it and seemed to tug at the lower rails to pull them down to ruin. On either side it disappeared into thickets of birch and oak and pitch pine, planted, as were the blackberry vines, by birds that stopped to rest a moment on the old fence or to satisfy their curiosity. Stout young trees had crowded it aside and broken it. Here and there a leaning post was overgrown with woodbine. The rails were gray and moss-grown. Nature was trying hard to make it a bit of the landscape; it could not much longer retain its individuality. The wild things of the woods had long accepted it as theirs, though not quite as they accepted the vines and trees.

As I sat there, a robin hurred himself upon

*Chigegee-lokh-sis*



*Ch'geeg'ee-lokh-sis*

the fence from the top of a cedar, where he had been, a moment before, practising his mating song. He did not intend to light, but some idle curiosity, like my own, made him pause a moment on the old gray rail. Then a woodpecker lit on the side of a post and sounded it softly. But he was too near the ground, too near his enemies to make a noise; so he flew to a higher perch and beat a tattoo that made the woods ring. He was safe there, and could make as much noise as he pleased. A wood mouse stirred the vines and appeared for an instant on the lower rail, then disappeared as if very much frightened at having shown himself in the sunlight. He always does just so at his first appearance.

Presently a red squirrel rushes out of the thicket at the left, scurries along the rails and up and down the posts. He goes like a little red whirlwind, though he has nothing whatever to hurry about. Just opposite my stump he stops his rush with marvelous suddenness; chatters, barks, scolds, tries to make me move; then goes on and out of sight at the same breakneck rush. A jay stops a

moment in a young hickory above the fence to whistle his curiosity, just as if he had not seen it fifty times before. A curiosity to him never grows old. He does not scream now; it is his nesting time. — And so on through the afternoon. The old fence is becoming a part of the woods; and every wild thing that passes by stops to get acquainted.

I was weaving an idle history when a chickadee twittered in the pine behind me. As I turned, he flew over me and lit on the topmost mossy rail. He had something in his beak; so I watched to find his nest; for I wanted very much to see him at work. Chickadee had never seemed afraid of me, and I thought he would trust me now. But he did not. He would not go near his nest. Instead he began hopping about the old rail, and pretended to be very busy hunting for insects.

Presently his mate appeared, and with a sharp note he called her down beside him. Then both birds hopped and twittered about the rail, with apparently never a care in the world. The male especially seemed just in



*Chigeegee-lokh-sis*

the mood for a frolic. He ran up and down the mossy rail; he whirled about it till he looked like a little gray pinwheel; he hung head down by his toes, dropped and turned like a cat, so as to light on his feet on the rail below. While watching his performance, I hardly noticed that his mate had gone till she reappeared suddenly beside him. Then he disappeared, while she kept up the performance on the rail, with more of a twitter, perhaps, and less of gymnastics. In a few moments both birds were together again and flew into the pines out of sight.

I had almost forgotten them in watching other birds, when they reappeared on the rail and went through a similar performance. This was unusual, certainly; and I sat very quiet, very much interested, though a bit puzzled, and a bit disappointed that they had not gone to their nest. They had some material in their beaks both times, and were now probably hunting for more — for rabbit fur, perhaps, in the old orchard. But what had they done with it? “Perhaps,” I thought, “they dropped it to deceive me.” Chickadee

does that sometimes. "But why did one bird stay on the rail? Perhaps"— Well, I would look and see.

I left my stump and began to examine the posts of the old fence carefully. Chickadee's nest was there somewhere. In the second post on the left I found it, a tiny knot-hole, which Chickadee had hollowed out deep and lined with rabbit fur. It was well hidden by the vines that almost covered the old post, and gray moss grew all about the entrance. A prettier nest I never found.

I went back to the pines and sat where I could just see Ch'geegee's doorway. No other birds interested me now till the chickadees came back. They were soon there, hopping about on the rail as before, with just a wee note of surprise in their soft twitter that I had changed my position. This time I was not to be deceived by a gymnastic performance, however interesting. I kept my eyes fastened on the nest. The male was going through with his most difficult feats, doing his best to engage my attention, when I saw his mate glide suddenly from behind

*Ch'geegee-lokh-sis*



*Chigegee-lokh-sis*

the post and disappear into her doorway. I could hardly be sure it was a bird. It seemed rather as if the wind had stirred a little bundle of gray moss. Had she moved slowly I might not have seen her, so closely did her soft gray cloak blend with the weather-beaten wood and moss.

In a few moments she reappeared, waited a moment with her tiny head peering out of the knot-hole, flashed round the post out of sight; and when I saw her again it was as she reappeared suddenly beside the male.



Then I watched him. While his mate whisked about the top rail he dropped to the middle one, hopped gradually to one side, then dropped suddenly to the lowest one, half hidden by vines, and disappeared. I turned my eyes to the nest. In a moment there he was — just a little gray flash, appearing for an instant from behind the post, only to disappear into the dark entrance. When he came out again I had but a glimpse of him till he appeared on the rail near me, beside his mate.

Their little ruse was now quite evident. They had come back from gathering rabbit fur, and found me, unexpectedly, near their nest. Instead of making a fuss and betraying it, as other birds might do, they lit on the rail before me, and were as sociable as only chickadees know how to be. While one entertained me, and kept my attention, the other dropped to the bottom rail and stole along behind it; then up behind the post that held their nest, and back the same way, after leaving his material. Then he held my attention while his mate did the same thing.

For two hours or more I sat there beside the pine thicket, while the chickadees came and went. Sometimes they approached the nest from the other side, and I did not see them, or got only a glimpse as they glided into their doorway. Whenever they approached from my side they always stopped on the rail and went through their little performance to distract my attention. Gradually they grew more confident, reassured by my stillness; or thinking perhaps that they

*Chigeegee-lokh-sis*



had entertained me so well that I did not even suspect them of nest-building.

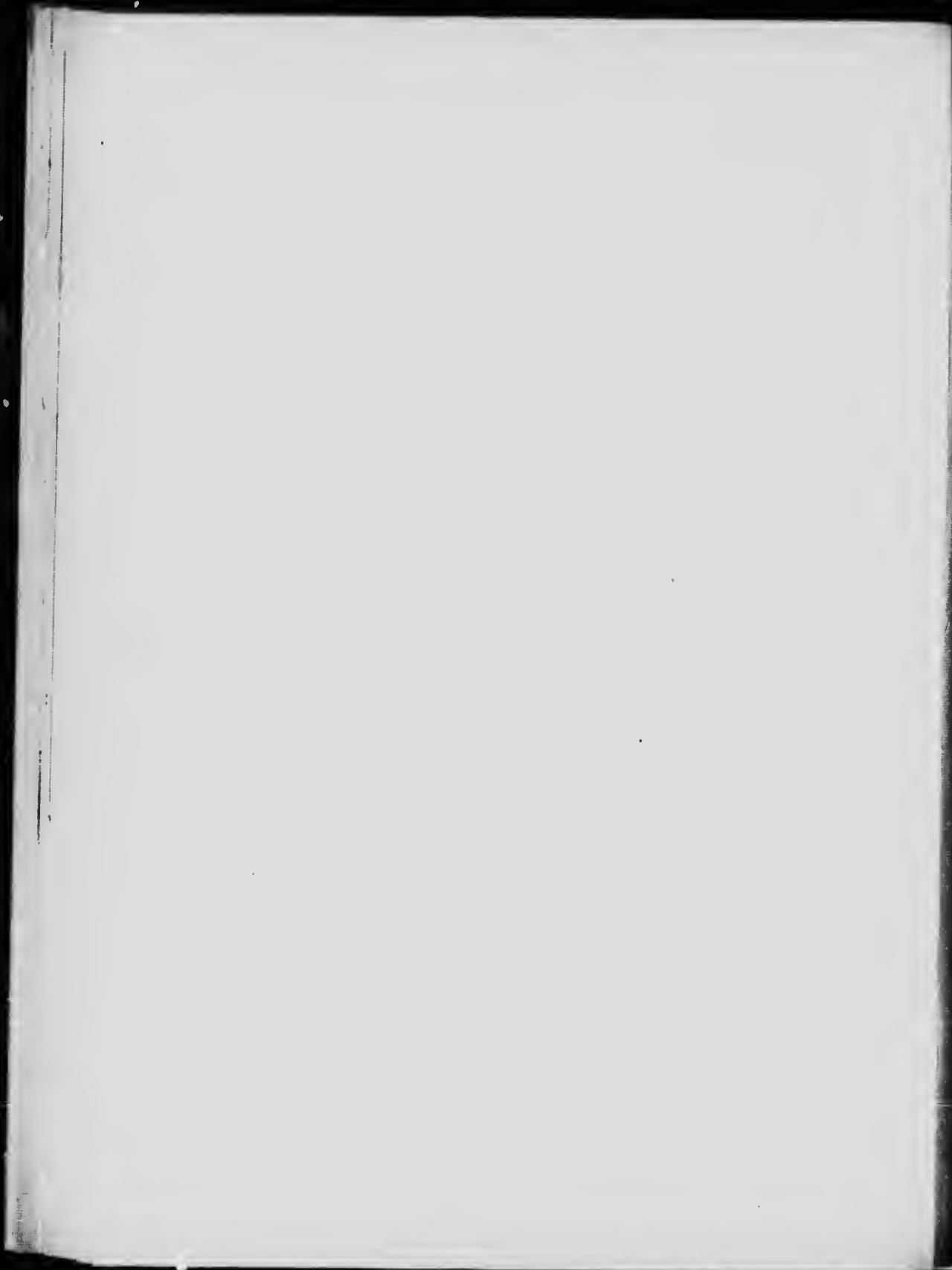
*Chigegee-lokh-sis*



As the afternoon wore away and the sun dropped into the pine tops, the chickadees grew hungry and left their work until the morrow. They were twittering among the young birch buds when I left them, sharing their best finds generously and calling softly to each other lest they stray too far apart while hunting their supper.

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## A WILD DUCK



THE title will suggest to most people a line across the autumn sky at sunset, with a bit of mystery about it: or else a dark triangle moving southward, high and swift, at Thanksgiving time. To a few, who know well the woods and fields about their homes, it may suggest a lonely little pond, with a dark bird rising swiftly, far out of reach, leaving the ripples playing among the sedges. To those accustomed to look sharply it will suggest five or six more birds, downy little fellows, hiding safe among roots and grasses, so still that one seldom suspects their presence. The duck, like most game birds, loves solitude; the details of his life he keeps very closely to himself; and one must be content with occasional glimpses.

*A Wild Duck*

This is especially true of the dusky duck, generally known by the name black duck among hunters. An ordinary tramp with a field glass, and eyes wide open, may give a rare, distant view of him; but only as one follows him winter after winter, meeting with much less of success than of discouragement, does he pick up many details of his personal life; for wildness is born in him, and no experience with man is needed to develop it. On lonely lakes, in the midst of a Canada forest, where he meets man for the first time, he is the same as when he builds at the head of some mill pond, within sight of a busy New England town. Other ducks may, in time, be tamed and used as decoys; but not so he. Several times I have tried it with wing-tipped birds; but the result was always the same. They worked night and day to escape, refusing all food and even water till they broke through their pen, or were dying of hunger, when I let them go.

One spring a farmer whom I know determined to try with young birds. He found a black duck's nest and hatched the eggs, with

*A Wild Duck*

some others, under a tame duck. Every time he approached the pen the little things skulked away and hid; nor could they be induced to show themselves, although their tame companions were feeding and running about, quite contented. After two weeks, when he thought them somewhat accustomed to their surroundings, he let the whole brood go down to the shore just below his house. The moment they were free the wild birds scurried away into the water grass, and no amount of anxious quacking on the part of the mother could bring them back into captivity. He never saw them again.

This habit, which the young birds have, of skulking away out of sight, is a measure of protection that they practise constantly. A brood may be seen on almost any secluded pond or lake in New England, where the birds come in the early spring to build their nests. Watching from some hidden spot on the shore, one sees them diving and swimming about, hunting for food everywhere in the greatest freedom. The next moment they scatter and disappear, so suddenly that

*A Wild Duck*

one rubs his eyes to make sure that the birds are really gone. If he is near enough, he has heard a low cluck from the old bird, which now sits with neck standing straight up out of the water, so still as to be easily mistaken for one of the old stumps or bogs among which they are feeding. She is looking about to see if the ducklings are all well hidden. After a moment there is another cluck, very much like the first, and downy little fellows come bobbing out of the grass, or from close beside the stumps where you looked a moment before and saw nothing. This is repeated at frequent intervals, the object being to accustom the young birds to hide instantly when danger approaches.

So watchful is the old bird, however, that trouble rarely threatens without her knowledge. When the young are well hidden, at the first sign of the enemy, she takes wing and leaves them, returning when danger is over, to find them still crouching motionless in their hiding places. When surprised she acts like other game birds, — flutters along with a great splashing, trailing one wing as

if wounded, till she has led you away from the young, or occupied your attention long enough for them to be safely hidden; then she takes wing and leaves you.

The habit of hiding becomes so fixed with the young birds that they trust to it long after the wings have grown and they are able to escape by flight. Sometimes, in the early autumn, I have run the bow of my canoe almost over a full-grown bird, lying hidden in a clump of grass. A month later, in the same place, the canoe could hardly approach within a quarter of a mile without his taking alarm.

Once they have learned to trust their wings, they give up hiding for swift flight. But they never forget their early training, and, when wounded, hide with a cunning that is remarkable. Unless one has a good dog it is almost useless to look for a wounded duck, if there is any cover to be reached.

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## *A Wild Duck*





*A Wild Duck*

Hiding under a bank, crawling into a muskrat hole, worming a way under a bunch of dead grass or pile of leaves, clinging to a root under water, swimming around and around a clump of bushes just out of sight of his pursuer, diving and coming up behind a tuft of grass, — these are some of the ways by which I have known a black duck try to escape when I was looking for him.

With the first sharp frost that threatens to ice over the ponds in which they have passed the summer, the inland birds betake themselves to the seacoast, where there is more or less migration all winter. The great body of ducks moves slowly southward as the winter grows severe; but if food is plenty they winter all along the coast. It is then that they may be studied to the best advantage.

During the daytime they are stowed away in quiet little ponds and hiding places, or resting in large flocks on the shoals, out of reach of land and danger. When possible, they choose the former, because it gives them an abundance of fresh water, which is

a daily necessity; and because, unlike the coots which are often found in great numbers on the same shoals, they dislike tossing about on the waves for any length of time. But late in the autumn they desert the ponds and are seldom seen there again until spring, even though the ponds are open. They are very shy about being frozen in, and prefer to get their fresh water at the mouths of creeks and springs.

With all their caution, — and they are very good weather prophets, knowing the times of tides and the approach of storms, as well as the days when fresh water freezes, — they sometimes get caught. Once I found a flock of five in great distress, frozen into the thin ice while sleeping, no doubt, with heads tucked under their wings. At another time I found a single bird floundering about with a big lump of ice and mud attached to his tail. He had found the insects plentiful in some soft mud, at low tide, and stayed there too long with the thermometer at zero.

Night is their feeding time; on the sea-coast they fly in to the feeding grounds just



*A Wild Duck*

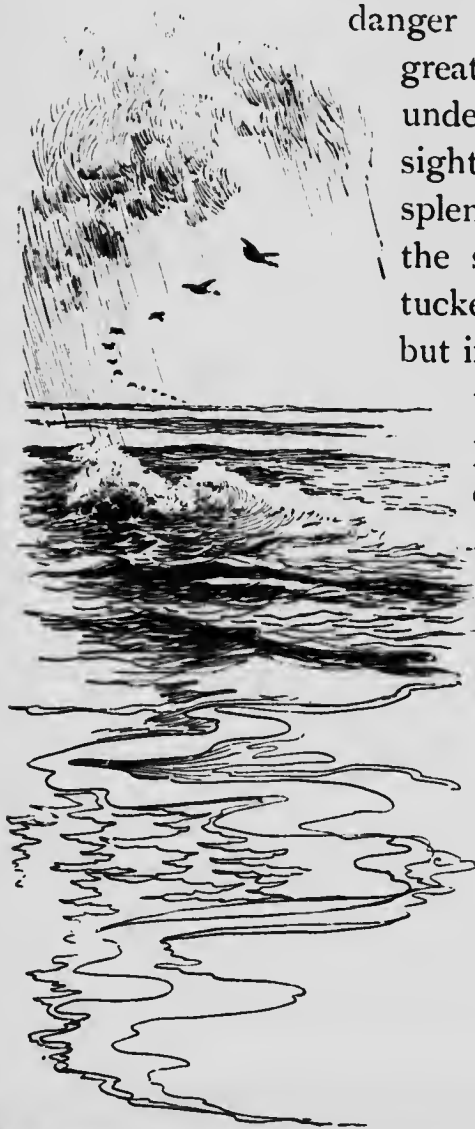
at dusk. Fog bewilders them, and no bird, except a plover, likes to fly in rain, because it makes the feathers heavy; so on foggy or rainy afternoons they come in early, or not at all. The favorite feeding ground is a salt marsh, with springs and creeks of brackish water. Seeds, roots, tender grasses, and snails and insects in the mud left by low tide are their usual winter food. When these grow scarce they betake themselves to the mussel beds with the coots; their flesh in consequence becomes strong and fishy.

When the first birds come in to the feeding grounds before dark, they do it with the greatest caution, examining not only the little pond or creek, but the whole neighborhood before lighting. The birds that follow trust to the inspection of these first comers, and generally fly straight in. For this reason it is well for one who attempts to see them at this time to have live decoys and, if possible, to have his blind built several days in advance, in order that the birds which may have been feeding in the place shall see no unusual object when they come in.

By moonlight one may sit on the bank in plain sight of his decoys, and watch the wild birds as long as he will. It is necessary only to sit perfectly still. But this is unsatisfactory; you can never see just what they are doing. Once I had thirty or forty close about me in this way. A sudden turn of my head, when a bat struck my cheek, sent them all off in a panic to the open ocean.

A curious thing about these birds, as they come in at night, is their power to make their wings noisy or almost silent at will. Sometimes the rustle is so slight that it is scarcely audible; at other times it is a strong *wish-wish* that can be heard two hundred yards away. The only theory I can suggest is that it is done as a kind of signal. In the daytime and on bright evenings one seldom hears it; on dark nights it is very frequent, and is always answered by the quacking of birds already on the feeding grounds, probably to guide the incomers. How they do it is uncertain; probably in some such way as the night-hawk makes his curious booming sound, — not by means of his open mouth,



*A Wild Duck*

as is generally supposed, but by slightly turning the wing quills so that the air sets them vibrating. One can test this, if he will, by blowing on any stiff feather.

On stormy days the birds, instead of resting on the shoals, light near some lonely part of the beach and, after watching carefully for an hour or two, to be sure that no danger is near, swim ashore and collect in great bunches in some sheltered spot under a bank. It is indeed a tempting sight to see perhaps a hundred of the splendid birds gathered close together on the shore, the greater part with heads tucked under their wings, fast asleep; but if you are to surprise them, you must turn Indian and crawl, and learn patience. Scattered along the beach on either side are single birds evidently acting as sentinels. The crows and gulls are flying continually along the tide-line after food; and invariably, as they pass over a flock of ducks, they rise in the air to look around

over all the bank. You must be well hidden to escape those bright eyes. The ducks understand crow and gull talk perfectly, and trust largely to these friendly sentinels. The gulls scream and the crows caw all day long, and not a duck takes his head from under his wing; but the instant either crow or gull utters his danger note, every duck is in the air and headed straight off shore.

The constant watchfulness of black ducks is perhaps the most remarkable thing about them. When feeding at night in some lonely marsh, or hidden away by day deep in the heart of the swamps, they never for a moment seem to lay aside their alertness, nor trust to their hiding places alone for protection. Even when lying fast asleep among the grasses with heads tucked under their wings, there is a nervous vigilance in their very attitudes, which suggests a sense of danger. Generally one has to content himself with studying them through a glass; but once I had a very good opportunity of watching them close at hand, of outwitting them, as it were, at their own game of hide-and-seek. It



*A Wild Duck*

was in a grassy little pond, shut in by high hills, on the open moors of Nantucket. The pond was in the middle of a plain, a hundred yards from the nearest hill. No tree or rock or bush offered any concealment to an enemy; the ducks could sleep there as sure of detecting the approach of danger as if on the open ocean.

One autumn day I passed the place and, looking cautiously over the top of a hill, saw a single black duck swim out of the water grass. After a few minutes of watching, he went into the grass again, and I started to creep down the hill, keeping my eyes intently on the pond. Halfway down, another duck appeared, and I dropped flat on the hillside in plain sight. Of course the duck noticed the unusual object. There was a commotion in the grass; heads came up here and there. The next moment, to my great astonishment, fully fifty black ducks were swimming about in the greatest uneasiness.

I lay very still and watched. Five minutes passed; then quite suddenly all motion ceased in the pond; every duck sat with neck

standing straight up from the water, looking directly at me. So still were they that one could easily have mistaken them for stumps or peat bogs. After a few minutes of this kind of watching they seemed satisfied, and glided back, a few at a time, into the grass.

When all were gone I rolled down the hill into some tall grass at the edge of a little run. Then it was easier to advance without being discovered; for whenever a duck came out to look round — which happened almost every minute at first — I could drop into the grass and be out of sight.

In half an hour I had gained the edge of a low bank, well covered by coarse water grass. Just below me, within six feet, was a big drake, with head drawn down so close to his body that I wondered what he had done with his neck. His eyes were closed; he was fast asleep. In front of him were eight or ten more ducks, close together, all with heads under their wings. Scattered about in the grass everywhere were small groups, sleeping, or pluming their glossy dark feathers.





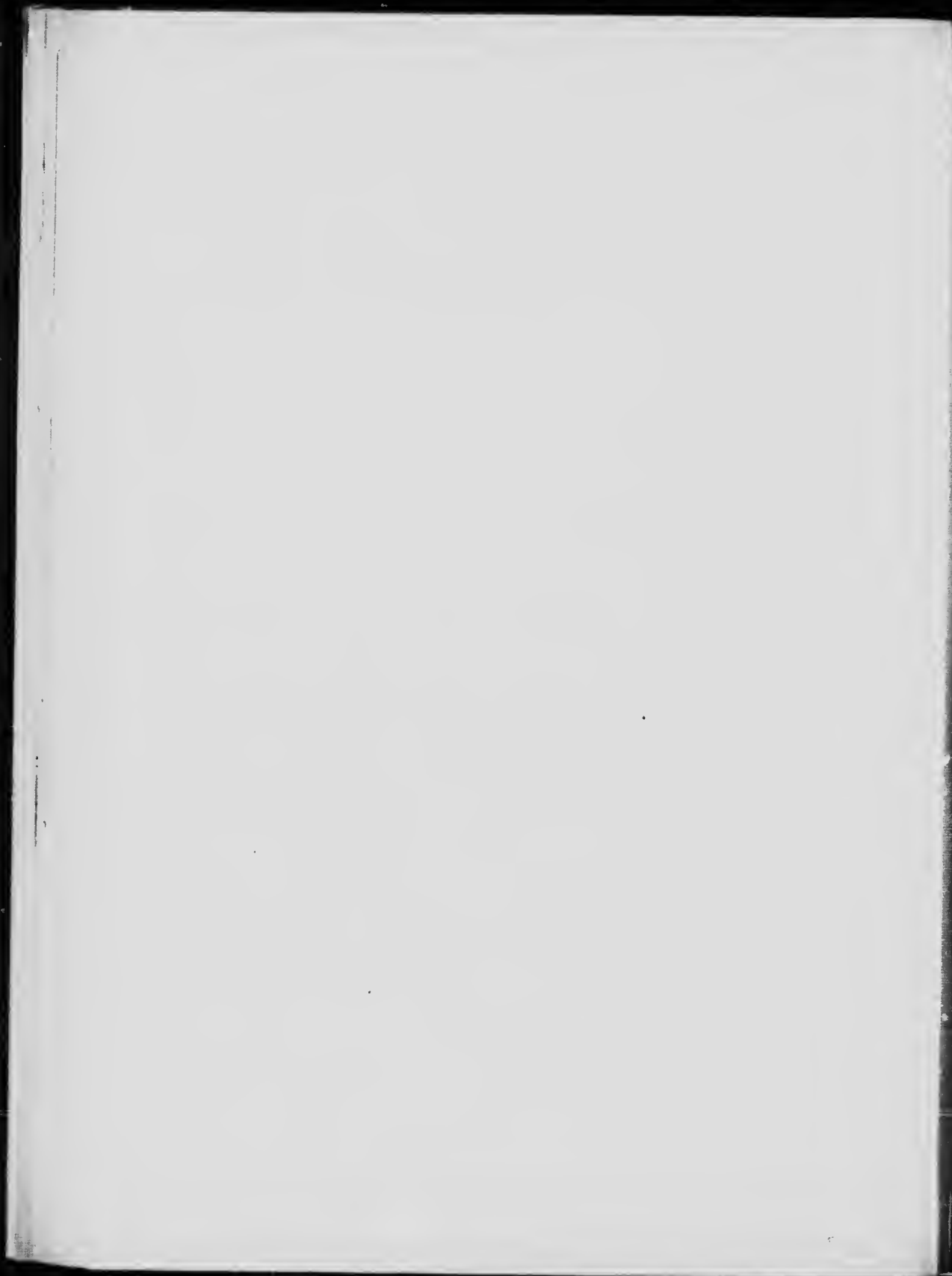
*A Wild Duck*

Beside the pleasure of watching them, the first black ducks that I had ever seen unconscious, there was the satisfaction of thinking how completely they had been outwitted at their own game of sharp watching. How they would have jumped, had they known what was lying there in the grass so near their hiding place! At first, every time I saw an eye wink, or a head come from under a wing, I felt myself shrinking close together in the thought that I was discovered; but that wore off after a time, when I found that the eye winked rather sleepily, and the necks were taken out just to stretch them, much as one would take a comfortable yawn.

Once I was caught squarely, but the grass, and my being so near, saved me. I had raised my head and lay with chin in my hands, deeply interested in watching a young duck making a most elaborate toilet, when from the other side an old bird shot into the open water and saw me as I dropped out of sight. There was a low quack which brought every duck out of his hiding, wide awake on the instant. At first they all bunched



There was a low quack which brought every duck out of his hiding



together at the farther side, looking straight at the bank where I lay. Then they drew gradually nearer till they were again within the fringe of water grass. Some of them sat quite up on their tails by a vigorous use of their wings, and stretched their necks to look over the low bank. Just keeping still saved me. In five minutes they were quiet again; even the young duck seemed to have forgotten her vanity and gone to sleep with the others.

Two or three hours I lay thus and watched them through the grass, spying very rudely, no doubt, into the seclusion of their home life. As the long shadow of the western hill stretched across the pool, the ducks awoke one by one from their nap and began to stir about in preparation for departure. Soon they were collected at the center of the open water, where they sat for a moment very still, heads up, and ready. If there was any signal given I did not hear it. At the same moment each pair of wings struck the water with a sharp splash, and they shot straight up in that remarkable way of theirs, as if thrown

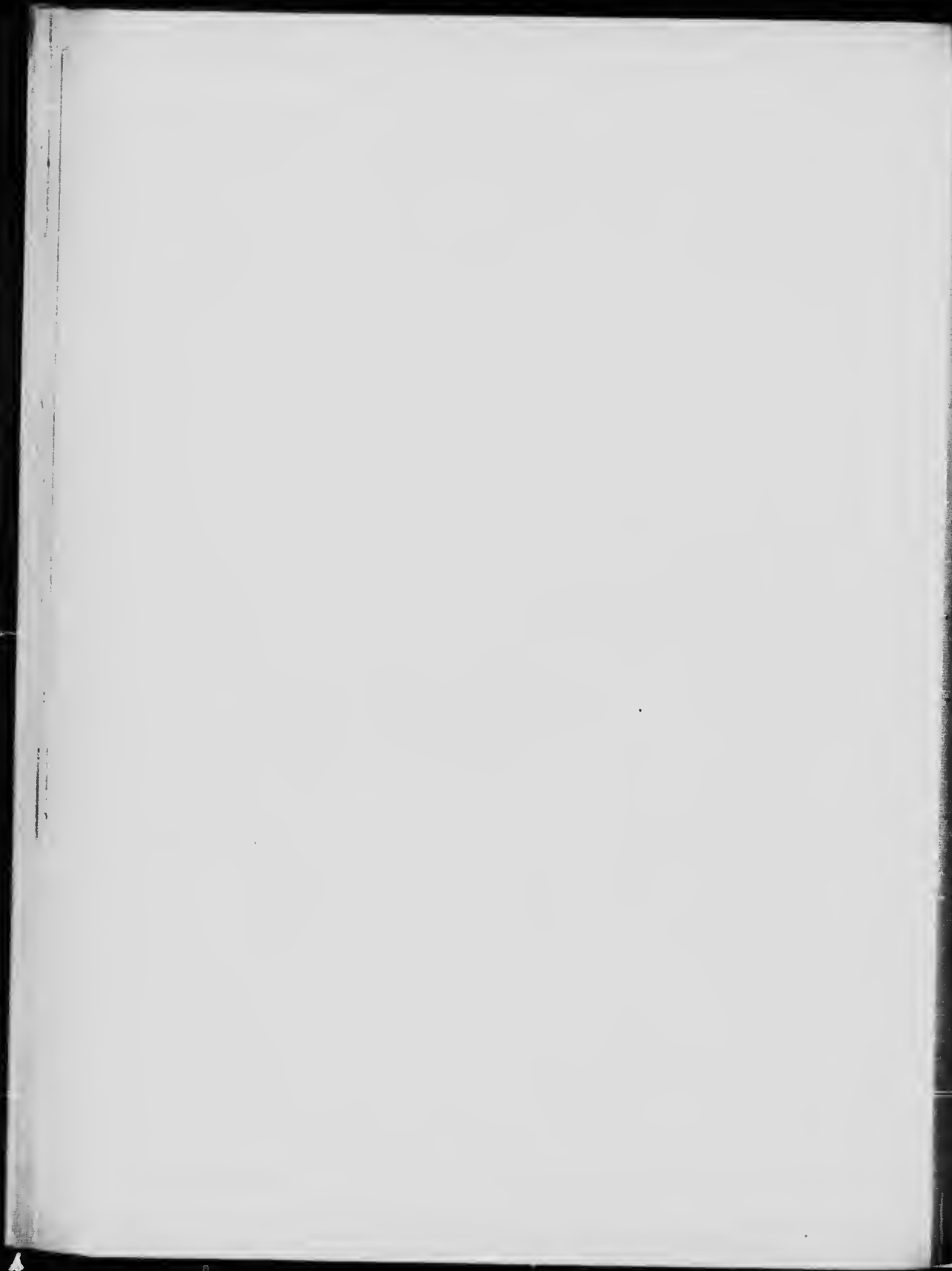


*A Wild Duck*


by a strong spring. An instant they seemed to hang motionless in the air, high above the water, then they turned and disappeared swiftly over the eastern hill toward the marshes.

HUKWEEM THE NIGHT VOICE





## HUKWEEM THE NIGHT VOICE



**H**UKWEEM the loon must go through the world crying for what he never gets, and searching for one whom he never finds; for he is the hunting-dog of Clote Scarpe. So said Simmo to me, one night, in explaining why the loon's cry is so wild and sad.

Clote Scarpe, by the way, is the legendary hero, the Hiawatha of the northern Indians. Long ago he lived on the Wollastook and ruled the animals, which all lived peaceably together, understanding each other's language; and "nobody ever ate anybody," as Simmo says. But when Clote Scarpe went



*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice*

away they quarreled, and Lhoks the panther and Nemox the fisher took to killing the other animals. Malsun the wolf soon followed, and ate all he killed; and Meeko the squirrel, who always makes all the mischief he can, set even the peaceable animals by the ears, so that they feared and distrusted each other. Then they scattered through the big woods, living each one for himself; and now the strong ones kill the weak, and nobody understands anybody any more.

There were no dogs in those days. Hukweem was Clote Scarpe's hunting companion when he hunted the great evil beasts that disturbed the wilderness; and Hukweem alone, of all the birds and animals, remained true to his master. For hunting makes strong friendship, says Simmo; and that is true. Therefore does Hukweem go through the world, looking for his master and calling him to come back. Over the tree-tops, when he flies low looking for new waters; high in air, out of sight, on his southern migrations; and on every lake, where he is only a voice, the sad night voice of the vast, solitary,

unknown wilderness, — everywhere you hear him seeking. Even on the seacoast, in winter, where he knows Clote Scarpe cannot be, — for Clote Scarpe hates the sea, — Hukweem forgets himself, and cries occasionally out of pure loneliness.

When I asked what Hukweem says when he cries — for all cries of the wilderness have their interpretation — Simmo answered: "Wy, he say two ting. First he say, *Where are you? O, where are you?* Dass what you call-um his laugh, like he crazee. Denn, wen nobody answer, he say, *O, I so sorry, so sorry! Ooooo-eee!* like woman lost in woods. An' dass his tother cry."

This comes nearer to explaining the wild unearthliness of Hukweem's call than anything else I know. It makes things much simpler to understand, when you are camped deep in the wilderness, and the night falls, and out of the misty darkness under the timber shore comes a wild, shivering call that makes one's nerves tingle till he finds out about it — *Where are you? O, where are you?* That is just like Hukweem.

*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice*



*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice.*

Sometimes, however, he varies the cry, and asks very plainly: "Who are you? O, who are you?" There was a loon on the Big Squattuk lake, where I camped one summer, who was full of inquisitiveness as a blue jay. He lived alone at one end of the lake; while his mate, with her brood of two, lived at the other end, nine miles away. Every morning and evening he came close to my camp—very much nearer than is usual; for loons are wild and shy in the wilderness—to cry out his challenge. Once, late at night, I flashed a lantern at the end of the old log that served as a landing for the canoes, where I had heard strange ripples; and there was Hukweem, examining everything with the greatest curiosity.

Every unusual thing in our doings made him inquisitive to know all about it. Once, when I started down the lake with a fair wind, and a small spruce set up in the bow of my canoe for a sail, he followed me four or five miles, calling all the way. And when I came back to camp at twilight with a big bear in the canoe, his shaggy head showing

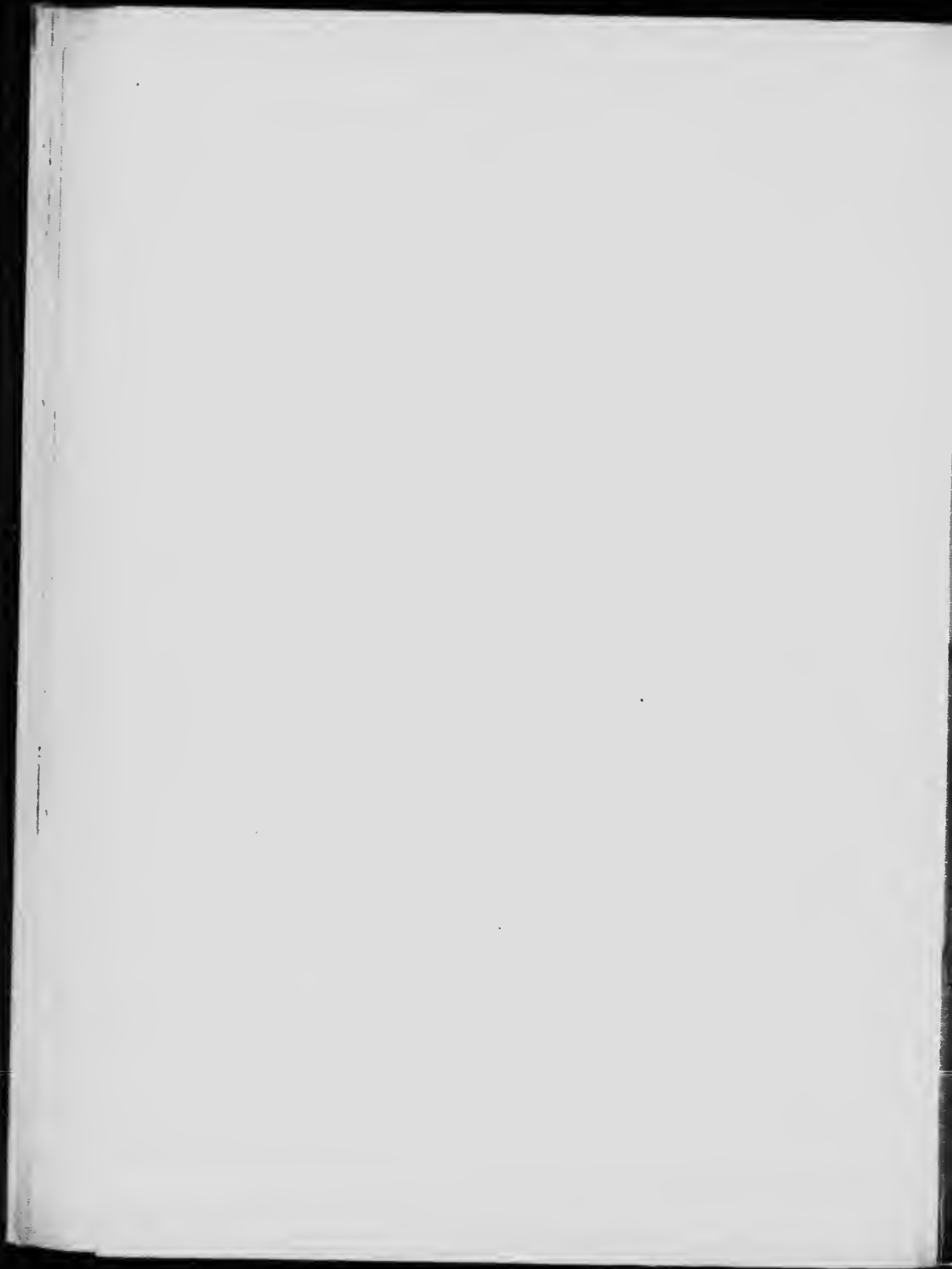
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Charles Copeland

Hukweem's curiosity could stand it no longer



over the bow, and his legs up over the middle thwart, like a little old black man with his wrinkled feet on the table, Hukweem's curiosity could stand it no longer. He swam up within twenty yards, and circled the canoe half a dozen times, sitting up straight on his tail by a vigorous use of his wings, stretching his neck like an inquisitive duck, so as to look into the canoe and see what queer thing I had brought with me.

He had another curious habit, which afforded him unending amusement. There was a deep bay on the west shore of the lake, with hills rising abruptly on three sides. The echo here was remarkable, a single shout brought a dozen distinct answers, and then a confusion of tongues as the echoes and reëchoes from many hills met and mingled. I discovered the place in an interesting way.

One evening, as I was returning to camp from exploring the upper lake, I heard a wild crying of loons on the west side. There seemed to be five or six of the great divers, all laughing and shrieking like so many

*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice*



*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice.*



lunatics. Pushing over to investigate, I noticed for the first time the entrance to a great bay, and paddled up cautiously behind a point, so as to surprise the loons at their game. For they play games, just as crows do. But when I looked in, there was only one bird, Hukweem the Inquisitive. I knew him instantly by his great size and beautiful markings. He would give a single sharp call, and listen intently, swinging his head from side to side as the separate echoes came ringing back from the hills. Then he would try his cackling laugh, *Ooo-áh-ha-ha-ha-hoo!* *ooo-áh-ha-ha-ha-hoo!* and as the echoes began to clatter about his head he would get excited, sitting up on his tail, flapping his wings, cackling and shrieking with glee at his own performance. Every wild syllable was flung back like a shot from the surrounding hills, till the air seemed full of loons, all mingling their crazy cachinnations with the din of the chief performer. The uproar made one shiver. Then Hukweem would cease suddenly, listening intently to the warring echoes. Before the confusion

was ended he would get excited again, and swim about in small circles, spreading wings and tail, showing his fine feathers as if every echo were an admiring loon, pleased as a peacock with himself at having made such a noise in a quiet world.

There was another loon, a mother bird, on a different lake, whose two eggs had been carried off by a thieving muskrat; but she did not know who did it, for Musquash knows how to roll the eggs into water and carry them off, before eating, where the mother bird will not find the shells. She came swimming down to meet us the moment our canoe entered the lake; and what she seemed to cry was, "Where are they? O, where are they?" She followed us across the lake, accusing us of robbery, and asking the same question over and over.

But whatever the meaning of Hukweem's crying, it seems to constitute a large part of his existence. Indeed, it is as a cry that he is chiefly known—the wild, unearthly cry of the wilderness night. His education for this begins very early. Once I was exploring

III

*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice*





*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice.*

the grassy shores of a wild lake when a mother loon appeared suddenly, out in the middle, with a great splashing and crying. I paddled out to see what was the matter. She withdrew with a great effort, apparently, as I approached, still crying loudly and beating the water with her wings. "Oho," I said, "you have a nest in there somewhere, and now you are trying to get me away from it." This was the only time I have ever known a loon to try that old mother bird's trick. Generally they slip off the nest while the canoe is yet half a mile away, and swim under water a long distance, and watch you silently from the other side of the lake.

I went back and hunted awhile for the nest among the bogs of a little bay; then left the search to investigate a strange call that sounded continuously farther up the shore. It came from some hidden spot in the tall grass, an eager little whistling cry, reminding me somehow of a nest of young fish-hawks.

As I waded cautiously among the bogs, trying to locate the sound, I came suddenly upon the loon's nest — just the bare top of a

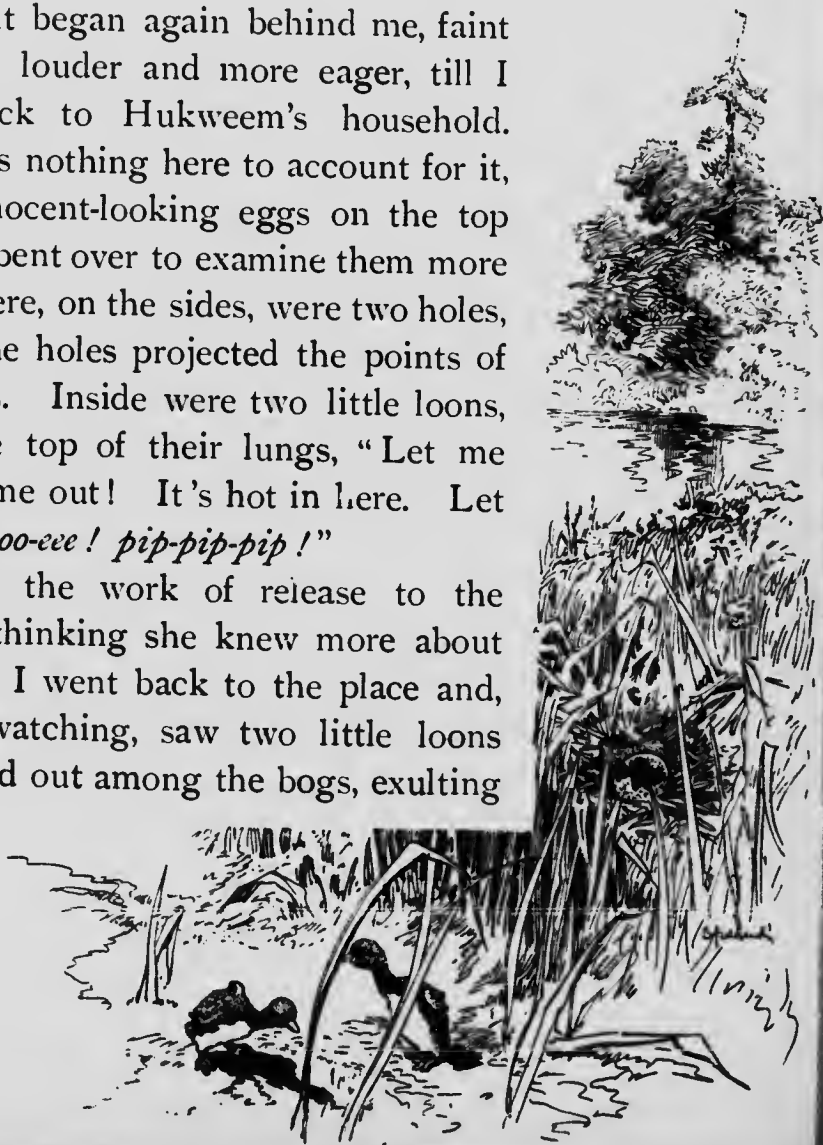
bog, where the mother bird had pulled up the grass and hollowed the earth enough to keep the eggs from rolling out. They were there on the bare ground, two large olive eggs with dark blotches. I left them undisturbed and went on to investigate the crying, which had stopped a moment as I approached the nest.

Presently it began again behind me, faint at first, then louder and more eager, till I traced it back to Hukweem's household. But there was nothing here to account for it, only two innocent-looking eggs on the top of a bog. I bent over to examine them more closely. There, on the sides, were two holes, and out of the holes projected the points of two tiny bills. Inside were two little loons, crying at the top of their lungs, "Let me out! O, let me out! It's hot in here. Let me out—*Oooo-eee! pip-pip-pip!*"

But I left the work of release to the mother bird, thinking she knew more about it. Next day I went back to the place and, after much watching, saw two little loons stealing in and out among the bogs, exulting

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*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice*



*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice*

in their freedom, but silent as two shadows. The mother bird was off on the lake, fishing for their dinner.

Hukweem's fishing is always an interesting thing to watch. Unfortunately he is so shy that one seldom gets a good opportunity. Once I found his favorite fishing ground, and came every day to watch him from a thicket on the shore. It was of little use to go in a canoe. At my approach he would sink deeper and deeper in the water, as if taking in ballast. How he does this is a mystery; for his body is much lighter than its bulk of water. Dead or alive, it floats like a cork; yet without any perceptible effort, by an impulse of will apparently, he sinks it out of sight. You are approaching in your canoe, and he moves off slowly, swinging his head from side to side so as to look at you, first with one eye, then with the other. Your canoe is swift; he sees that you are gaining; that you are already too near. He swings on the water, and sits watching you steadily. Suddenly he begins to sink, deeper and deeper, till his back is

just awash. Go a little nearer, and now his body disappears; only his neck and head remain above water. Raise your hand, or make any quick motion, and he is gone altogether. He dives like a flash, swims deep and far, and when he comes to the surface will be well out of danger.

If you notice the direction of his bill as it enters the water, you can tell fairly well where he will come up again. It was confusing at first, in chasing him, to find that he rarely came up where he was expected. I would paddle hard in the direction he was going, only to find him far to the right or left, or behind me, when at last he showed himself. That was because I followed his body, not his bill. Moving in one direction, he will turn his head and dive. That is to mislead you, if you are following him. Follow his bill, as he does himself, and you will be near him when he rises; for he rarely turns under water.

With two good men to paddle, it is not difficult to tire him out. Though he swims with extraordinary rapidity under water —

*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice*



*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice*



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fast enough to follow and catch a trout—a long, deep dive tires him, and he must rest before another. If you are chasing him, shout and wave your hat the moment he appears, and paddle hard the way his bill points as he dives again. The next time he comes up you are nearer to him. Send him down again quick, and after him. The next time he is frightened to see the canoe so close, and dives deep, which tires him the more. So his disappearances become shorter and more confused; you follow him more surely because you can see him plainly now as he goes down. Suddenly he bursts out of water beside you, scattering the spray into your canoe. Once he came up under my paddle, and I plucked a feather from his back before he got away.

This last appearance always scares him out of his wits, and you get what you have been working hard for—a sight of Hukweem getting under way. Away he goes in a smother of spray, beating the water with his wings, kicking hard to lift himself up; and so for a hundred yards, leaving a wake like

a stern-wheel steamer, till he gathers headway enough to rise from the water.

After that first start there is no sign of awkwardness. His short wings rise and fall with a rapidity that tries the eye to follow, like the rush of a coot down wind to decoys. You can hear the swift, strong beat of them, far over your head, when he is not calling. His flight is very rapid, very even, and often at enormous altitudes. But when he wants to come down he always gets frightened, thinking of his short wings, and how high he is, and how fast he is going. On the ocean, in winter, where he has all the room he wants, he sometimes comes down in a great incline, miles long, and plunges through and over a dozen waves, like a dolphin, before he can stop. But where the lake is small, and he cannot come down that way, he has a dizzy time of it.

Once, on a little lake in September, I used to watch for hours to get a sight of the process. Twelve or fifteen loons were gathered there, holding high carnival. They called down every migrating loon that passed that

*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice*



*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice.*



way; their numbers increased daily. Twilight was the favorite time for arriving. In the stillness I would hear Hukweem far away, so high that he was only a voice. Presently I would see him whirling over the lake in a great circle. —“Come down; O, come down,” cry all the loons. “I’m afraid; *ooo-ho-ho-ho-ho-hoooo-eee!* I’m afraid,” says Hukweem, who is perhaps a little loon, all the way from Labrador on his first migration, and has never come down from a height before. “Come on; O, come *oh-ho-ho-ho-ho-hon!* It won’t hurt you; we did it; come on,” cry all the loons.

Then Hukweem would slide lower with each circle, whirling round and round the lake in a great spiral, yelling all the time, and all the loons answering. When low enough, he would set his wings and plunge like a shot at the very midst of the assembly, which scattered wildly, yelling like school-boys — “Look out! he’ll break his neck; he’ll hit you; he’ll break your back if he hits you.” — So they splashed away in a desperate fright, each one looking back over his

shoulder to see Hukweem come down; which he would do at a terrific pace, striking the water with a mighty splash, and shooting half across the lake in a smother of white, before he could get his legs under him and turn around. Then all the loons would gather round him, cackling, shrieking, laughing, with such a din as the little loon never heard in his life before; and he would go off in the midst of them, telling them, no doubt, what a mighty thing it was to come down from so high and not break his neck.

Later in the fall I saw those same loons do an astonishing thing. For several evenings they had been keeping up an unusual racket in a quiet bay, out of sight of my camp. I asked Simmo what they were doing. — "O, I don' know; playin' game, I guess, jus' like one boy. Hukweem do dat sometime, wen he not hongry," said Simmo, going on with his bean-cooking. That excited my curiosity; but when I reached the bay it was too dark to see what they were playing.

One evening, while I was fishing, the racket was different from any I had heard

*Hukweem,  
the Night  
Voice*



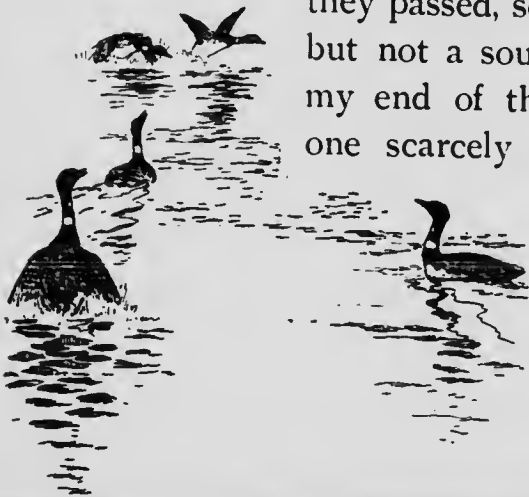


*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice.*



before. There would be an interval of perfect silence, broken suddenly by wild yelling; then the ordinary loon talk for a few minutes, and another silence, broken by a shriller outcry. That meant that something unusual was going on; so I left the trout, to find out about it.

When I pushed my canoe through the fringe of water grass on the point nearest the loons, they were scattered in a long line, twelve or fifteen of them, extending from the head of the bay to a point nearly opposite me. At the other end of the line two loons were swimming about, doing something which I could not make out. Suddenly the loon talk ceased. There may have been a signal given, which I did not hear. Anyway, the two loons faced about at the same moment and came tearing down the line, using wings and feet to help in the race. The upper loons swung in behind them as they passed, so as to watch the finish better; but not a sound was heard till they passed my end of the line in a close, hard race, one scarcely a yard ahead of the other;



when such a yelling began as I never heard before. All the loons gathered about the two swimmers; there was much cackling and crying, which grew gradually quieter; then they began to string out in another long line, and two more racers took their places at one end of it. By that time it was almost dark, and I broke up the race trying to get nearer in my canoe, so as to watch things better.

Twice since then I have heard from summer campers of their having seen loons racing across a lake. I have no doubt it is a frequent pastime with the birds when the summer cares for the young are ended, and autumn days are mellow, and fish are plenty, and there are long hours just for fun together, before Hukweem moves southward for the hard, solitary, winter life on the seacoast.

Of all the loons that cried out to me in the night, or shared the summer lakes with me, only one ever gave me the opportunity of watching at close quarters. It was on a very wild lake—so wild that no one had ever visited it before in summer—and a



*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice.*



mother loon felt safe in leaving the open shore, where she generally nests, and placing her eggs on a bog at the head of a narrow bay. I found them there a day or two after my arrival.

I used to go at all hours of the day, hoping the mother would get used to me and my canoe, so that I could watch her later, teaching her little ones; but her wildness was unconquerable. Whenever I came in sight of the nest-bog, with only the loon's neck and head visible, standing up straight and still in the grass, I would see her slip from the nest, scud away through the green cover to a deep place, and glide under water without leaving a ripple. Then, looking sharp over the gunwale into the clear water, I would get a glimpse of her—just a gray streak with a string of silver bubbles—passing deep and swift under my canoe. So she went through the opening, and appeared far out in the lake, where she would swim back and forth, as if fishing, until I went away. As I never disturbed her nest, and always paddled away soon, she thought that she had

fooled me, and that I knew nothing about her or her nest.

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Then I tried another plan. I lay down in my canoe, and had Simmo paddle me up to the nest. While the loon was out on the lake, hidden by the grassy shore, I went and sat on a bog, with a friendly alder bending over me, within twenty feet of the nest. Then Simmo paddled away, and Hukweem came back without the slightest suspicion. As I had supposed from the shape of the nest, she did not sit on her two eggs; she sat on the bog instead, and gathered them close to her side with her wing. That was all the brooding they had, or needed; for within a week there were two bright little loons to watch instead of the eggs.

After the first success I used to go alone and, while the mother bird was out on the lake, would pull my canoe up in the grass, a hundred yards or so below the nest. From here I entered the alders and made my way to the bog, where I could see Hukweem's household plainly. After a long wait she would steal into the bay and, after much fear



*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice.*

and circumspection, glide up to the canoe. It took a great deal of looking and listening to convince her that it was harmless, and that I was not hiding near in the grass. Once assured, however, she would come direct to the nest; and I had the satisfaction at last of watching a loon at close quarters.

She would sit there for hours — never sleeping apparently, for her eye was always bright — preening herself, turning her head slowly, so as to watch on all sides, snapping now and then at an obtrusive fly, — all in utter unconsciousness that I was just behind her, watching every movement. Then, when I had seen enough, I would steal away along a caribou path, and push off quietly in my canoe without looking back. She saw me, of course, when I entered the canoe, but not once did she leave the nest. When I reached the open lake, a little searching with my glass always showed me her head there in the grass, still turned in my direction apprehensively.

I had hoped to see her let the little ones out of their hard shell, and see them first take the water . . . but that was too much to

expect. One day I heard them whistling in the eggs; the next day, when I came, there was nothing to be seen on the nest-bog. I feared that something had heard their whistling and put an untimely end to the young Hukweems while mother bird was away. But when she came back, after a more fearful survey than usual of the old bark canoe, two downy little fellows came bobbing to meet her out of the grass, where she had hidden them and told them to stay till she came back. Like all wild birds, she had carried the eggshells far away, or swallowed them, lest their conspicuous whiteness guide some fierce, thieving eye to her household.

It was a rare treat to watch them at their first feeding, the little ones all eagerness, bobbing about in the delight of eating and the wonder of the new great world, the mother all tenderness and watchfulness. Hukweem had never looked to me so noble before. This great wild mother bird, moving ceaselessly with marvelous grace about her little ones, watching their play with exquisite fondness, and watching the great dangerous

*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice*



*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice.*

world for their sakes, now chiding them gently, now drawing near to touch them with her strong bill, or to rub their little cheeks with hers, or just to croon over them in an ecstasy of that wonderful mother love which makes the summer wilderness beautiful, — in ten minutes she upset my theories, and won me altogether, spite of what I had heard and seen of her destructiveness on the fishing grounds. After all, why should she not fish as well as I?

And then began the first lessons in swimming and hiding and diving, which I had waited so long to see.

Later I saw her bring little fish, which she had purposely crippled, turn them loose in shallow water, and with a sharp cluck bring the young loons out of their hiding, to set them chasing and diving wildly for their own dinners. But before that happened there was almost a tragedy.

One day, while the mother was gone fishing, the little ones came out of their hiding among the grasses, and ventured out some distance into the bay. It was their first

journey alone into the world; they were full of the wonder and importance of it. Suddenly, as I watched, they began to dart about wildly, moving with astonishing rapidity for such little fellows, and whistling loudly. From the bank above, a swift ripple had cut out into the water between them and the only bit of bog with which they were familiar. Just behind the ripple were the sharp nose and the beady eyes of Musquash, who is always in some mischief of this kind. In one of his prowlings he had discovered the little brood; now he was manœuvering craftily to keep the frightened youngsters moving till they should be tired out, while he swam between them and the shore, to cut off their retreat.

Musquash knows well that when a young loon, or a sheldrake, or a black duck is caught in the open, like that, he always tries to get back where his mother hid him when she went away. That is what the poor little fellows were trying to do now, only to be driven back and kept moving wildly by the muskrat, who lifted himself now and then from the water, and wiggled his ugly jaws in

*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice*





*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice.*



anticipation of the feast. He had missed the eggs in his search; but young loon would be better, and more of it. — “There you are!” he snapped viciously, lunging at the nearest loon, which flashed under water and barely escaped.

I had started up to interfere, for I had grown fond of the little wild things whose growth I had watched from the beginning, when a great splashing began on my left, and I saw the old mother bird coming like a fury. She was half swimming, half flying, tearing over the water at a great pace, a foamy white wake behind her. — “Now, you little villain, take your medicine. It’s coming; it’s coming,” I thought excitedly, and dodged back to watch. But Musquash, intent on his evil doing (he has no need whatever to turn flesh-eater), kept on viciously after the exhausted little ones, paying no heed to his rear.

Twenty yards away the mother bird, to my great astonishment, flashed out of sight under water. What could it mean! Suddenly a catapult seemed to strike the muskrat from beneath and lift him clear from the water.

With a tremendous rush and sputter Hukweem came out beneath him, her great pointed bill driven through to his spine. Little need of my help now. With another straight hard drive, this time at eye and brain, she flung him aside disdainfully, and rushed to her shivering little ones, questioning, chiding, praising them, all in the same breath, fluttering and cackling low in an hysteric wave of tenderness. Then she swam twice around the dead muskrat and led her brood away from the place.

Perhaps it was to one of those same little ones that I owe a service for which I am more than grateful. It was in September, when I was at a lake ten miles away—the same lake into which a score of frolicking young loons gathered before moving south, and swam a race or two for my benefit. I was lost one day, hopelessly lost, in trying to make my way from a trout pond where I had been fishing, to the lake where my camp was. It was late afternoon. To avoid the long hard tramp down a river, up which I had

*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice*



*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice.*

come in the early morning, I attempted to cut across through unbroken forest without a compass. Traveling through a northern forest in summer is desperately hard work. The moss is ankle deep, the underbrush thick; fallen logs lie across each other in hopeless confusion, through and under and over which one must make his laborious way, stung and pestered by hordes of black flies and mosquitoes. So that, unless you have a strong instinct of direction, it is almost impossible to hold your course without a compass, or a bright sun, to guide you.

I had not gone half the distance before I was astray. The sun was long obscured, and a drizzling rain set in, without any direction whatever in it by the time it reached the underbrush where I was. I had begun to make a little shelter, intending to put in a cheerless night there, when I heard a cry and, looking up, caught a glimpse of Hukweem speeding high over the tree-tops. Far down on my right came a faint answering cry, and I hastened in its direction, making an Indian compass of broken twigs as I went

along. Hukweem was a young loon, and was long in coming down. The crying ahead grew louder. Stirred up from their day rest by his arrival, the other loons began their sport earlier than usual. The crying soon became almost continuous, and I followed it straight to the lake.

Once there, it was a simple matter to find the river and my old canoe waiting patiently under the alders in the gathering twilight. Soon I was afloat again, with a sense of unspeakable relief that only one can appreciate who has been lost and now hears the ripples sing under him, knowing that the cheerless woods lie behind, and that the campfire beckons beyond yonder point. The loons were hallooing far away, and I went over — this time in pure gratitude — to see them again. But my guide was modest and vanished post-haste into the mist the moment my canoe appeared.

Since then, whenever I hear Hukweem in the night, or hear others speak of his unearthly laughter, I think of that cry over the tree-tops, and the thrilling answer far

*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice*



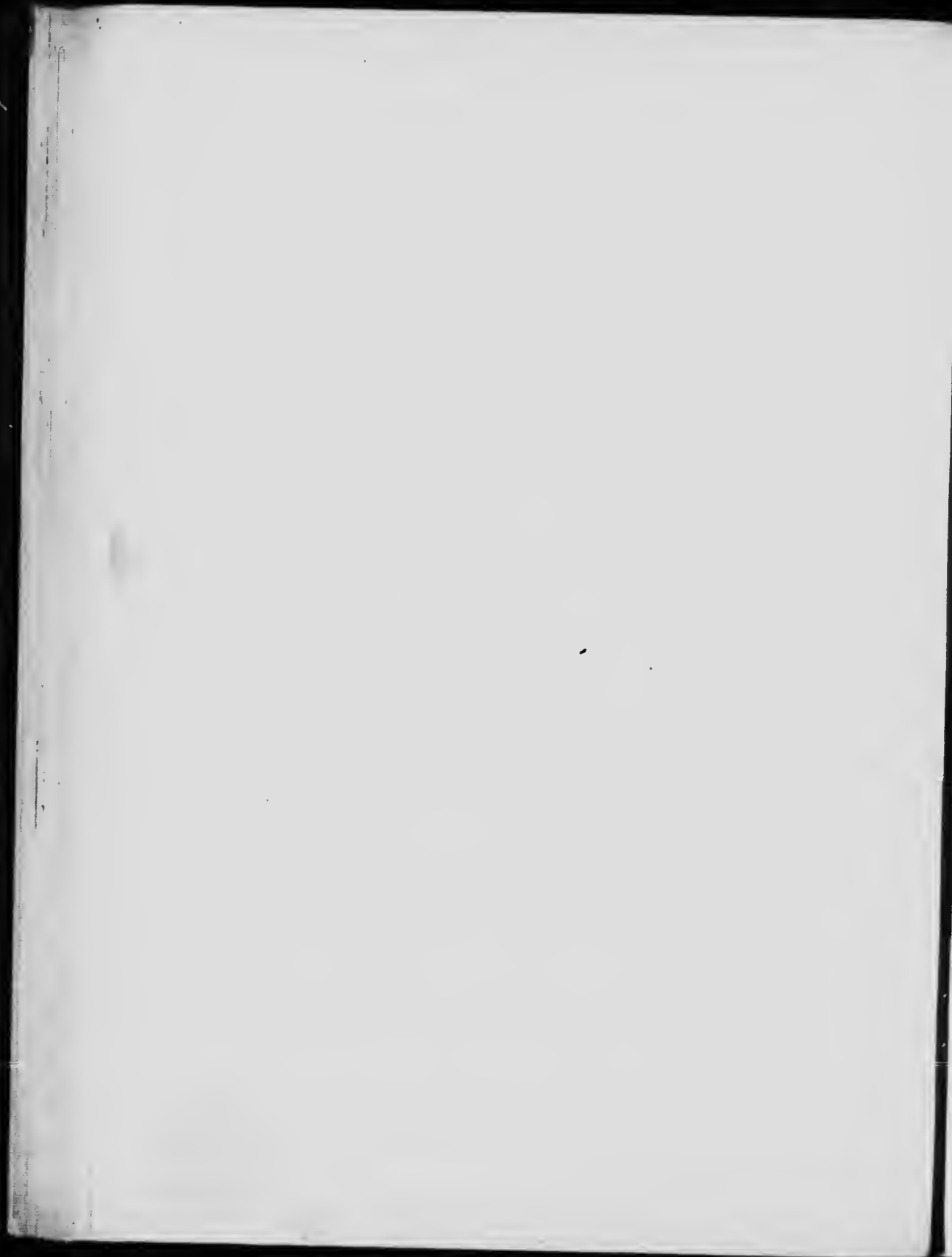
*Hukweem  
the Night  
Voice.*



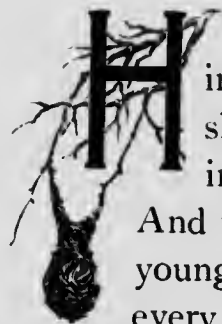
away. And the sound has a ring to it, in my ears, that it never had before. Hukweem the Night Voice found me astray in the woods, and brought me safe to a snug camp. — That is a service which one does not forget in the wilderness.



AN ❁❁❁❁  
ORIOLE'S  
NEST ❁❁



## AN ORIOLE'S NEST



HOW suggestive it is, swinging there through sunlight and shadow from the long drooping tips of the old elm boughs! And what a delightful cradle for the young orioles, swayed all day long by every breath of the summer breeze, peeping through chinks as the world sweeps by, watching with bright eyes the boy below who looks up in vain, or the mountain of hay that brushes them in passing, and whistling cheerily, blow high or low, with never a fear of falling! The mother bird must feel very comfortable about it as she goes off caterpillar hunting; for no bird enemy can trouble the little ones while she is gone. The black snake, that horror of all low-nesting birds, will never climb so high. The red squirrel — little wretch that he is, to eat young birds



*An Oriole's Nest*

—cannot find a footing on those delicate branches. Neither can the crow find a resting place from which to steal the young; and the hawk's legs are not long enough to reach down and grasp them, should he perchance venture near the house and hover an instant over the nest.

Besides all this, the oriole is a neighborly little body; and that helps her. Though the young are kept from harm anywhere by the cunning instinct which builds a hanging nest, she still prefers to build near the house, where hawks and crows and owls rarely come. She knows her friends and takes advantage of their protection, returning year after year to the same old elm, and, like a thrifty little housewife, carefully saving and sorting the good threads of her storm-wrecked old house to be used in building the new.

Of late years, however, it has seemed to me that the pretty nests on the secluded streets of New England towns are growing scarcer. The orioles are peace-loving birds, and dislike the society of those noisy, pugnacious little rascals, the English sparrows,

which have of late taken possession of our streets. Often now I find the nests far away from any house, on lonely roads where, a few years ago, they were rarely seen. Sometimes also a solitary farmhouse, too far from the town to be much visited by sparrows, has two or three nests swinging from its old elms, where formerly there was but one.

It is an interesting evidence of the bird's keen instinct that, where nests are built on lonely roads and away from houses, they are noticeably deeper, and so better protected from bird enemies. The same thing is sometimes noticed of nests built in maple or apple trees, which are without the protection of drooping branches, upon which birds of prey can find no footing. Some wise birds secure the same protection by simply contracting the neck of the nest, instead of building a deep one. Young birds, building their first nests, seem afraid to trust in the strength of their own weaving. Their nests are invariably shallow, and so suffer most from birds of prey.

In the choice of building material the birds are very careful. They know well that



*An Oriole's Nest*

no branch supports the nest from beneath; that the safety of the young orioles depends on good material, well woven together. In some wise way they seem to know at a glance whether a thread is strong enough to be trusted; but sometimes, in selecting the first threads that are to bear the whole weight of the nest they are unwilling to trust to appearances. At such times a pair of birds may be seen holding a little tug-of-war, with feet braced, shaking and pulling the thread like a pair of tilters, till it is well tested.



In gathering and testing the materials for a nest the orioles display no little ingenuity. One day, a few years ago, I was lying under some shrubs, watching a pair of the birds that were building close to the house. It was a typical nest-making day, the sun pouring his bright rays through delicate green leaves and a glory of white apple blossoms, the air filled with warmth and fragrance, birds and bees busy everywhere. Orioles seem always happy; to-day they quite overflowed in the midst of all the brightness, though

materials were scarce and they must needs be diligent.

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The female was very industrious, never returning to the nest without some contribution; while the male frolicked about the trees in his brilliant orange and black, whistling his warm rich notes, now seeming like a dash of southern sunshine amidst the blossoms. Sometimes he would in his frolic find a bit of something which he raised an abrupt *chilate*, or to fly with his mate to the nest uttering that soft rich twitter of hers—a mixture of blarney and congratulation whenever she found some particularly choice material. But his chief part seemed to be to furnish the celebration, while she took care of the nest-making.



Out in front of me, under the lee of the old wall which some line-stripping gale had blown it, was a torn fragment of cloth with some threads showing everywhere. I was wondering why the birds did not utilize it, when the male, in one of his lively flights, hovered and flew down. First he hopped all around it; next he tried some

*An Oriole's Nest*

threads; but, as the cloth was lying loose on the grass, the whole piece came whenever he pulled. For a few moments he worked diligently, trying a pull on each side in succession. Once he tumbled end over end in a comical scramble, as the fragment caught on a grass stub but gave way when he had braced himself and was pulling hardest. Quite abruptly he flew off, and I thought he had given up the attempt.

In a minute he was back with his mate, thinking, no doubt, that she, as a capable little manager, would know all about such things. If birds do not talk, they have at least some very ingenious ways of letting one another know what they think, which amounts to the same thing.

The two worked together for some minutes, getting an occasional thread, but not enough to pay for the labor. The trouble was that both pulled together on the same side; and so they merely dragged the bit of cloth all over the lawn, instead of pulling out the threads they wanted. Once they unraveled a long thread by pulling at right angles, but

the next moment they were together on the same side again. The male seemed to do, not as he was told, but exactly what he saw his mate do. Whenever she pulled at a thread, he hopped around, as close to her as he could get, and pulled too.



Twice they had given up the attempt, only to return after hunting diligently elsewhere. Good material was scarce that season. I was wondering how long their patience would last, when the female suddenly seized the cloth by a corner and flew along close to the ground, dragging it after her, chirping loudly the while. She disappeared into a hawthorn tree in a corner of the garden, whither the male followed her a moment later.

Curious as to what they were doing, yet fearing to disturb them, I waited where I was till I saw both birds fly to the nest, each with some long threads. This was repeated; and then curiosity got the better of consideration. While the orioles were weaving the last threads into their nest, I ran round the house, crept a long way

behind the old wall, and so to a safe hiding place near the hawthorn.

### *Ar In is Nest*



The orioles had solved their problem; the bit of cloth was fastened there securely among the thorns. Soon the birds came back and, seizing some threads by the ends, raveled them out without difficulty. It was the work of but a moment to gather as much material as they could use at one weaving. For an hour or more I watched them working industriously between the hawthorn and the old elm, where the nest was growing

rapidly to a beautiful depth. Several times the bit of cloth slipped from the thorns as the birds pulled upon it; but as often as it did they carried it back and fastened it more securely, till at last



it grew so snarled that they could get no more long threads, when they left it for good.

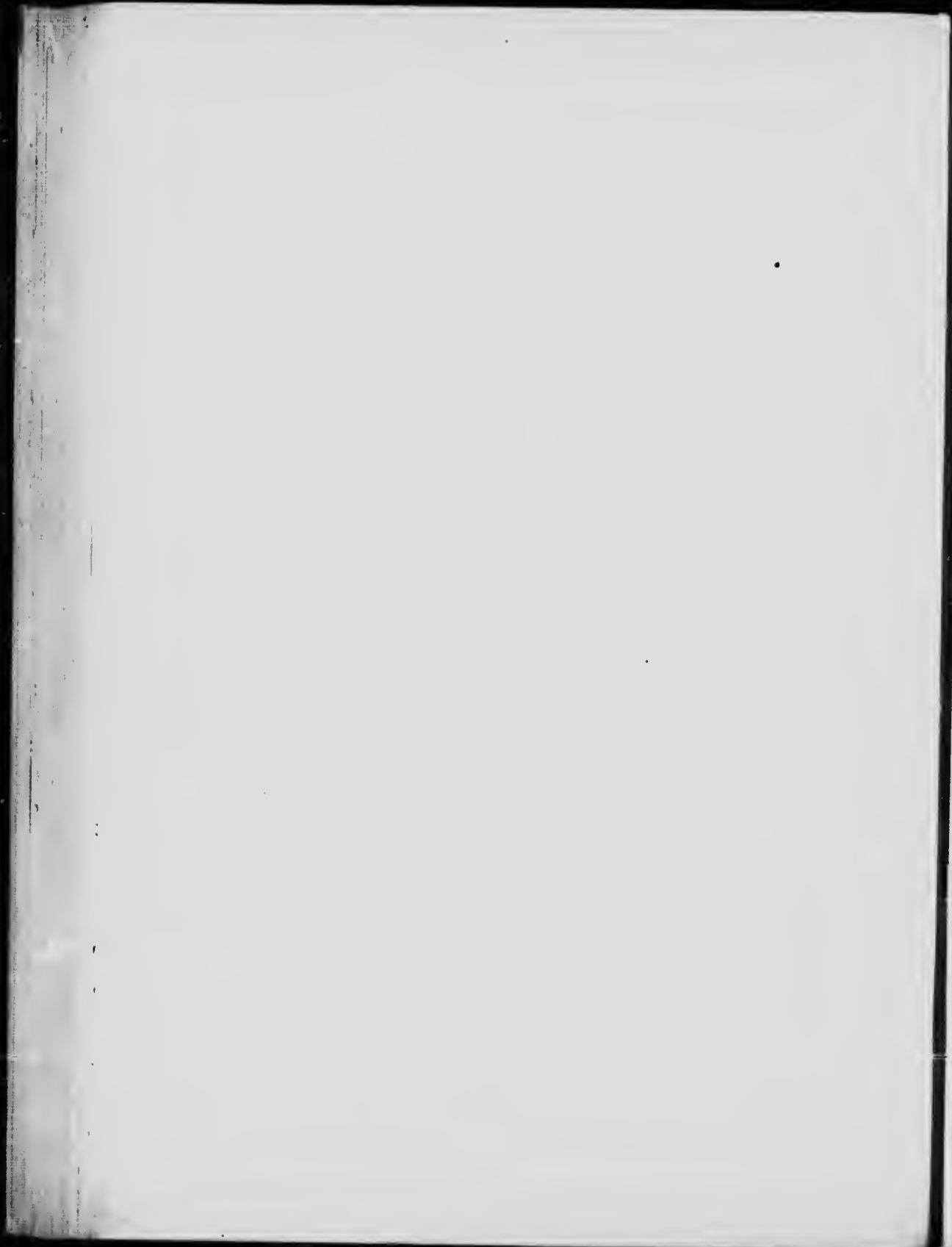
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That same day I carried out some bright-colored bits of worsted and ribbon, and scattered them on the grass. The birds soon found them and used them in completing their nest. For a while a gayer little dwelling was never seen in a tree. The bright bits of color in the soft gray of the walls gave the nest always a holiday appearance, in good keeping with the high spirits of the orioles. But by the time the young had chipped the shell, and the joyousness of nest-building had given place to the constant duties of filling hungry little mouths, the rains and the sun of summer had bleached the bright colors to a uniform sober gray.

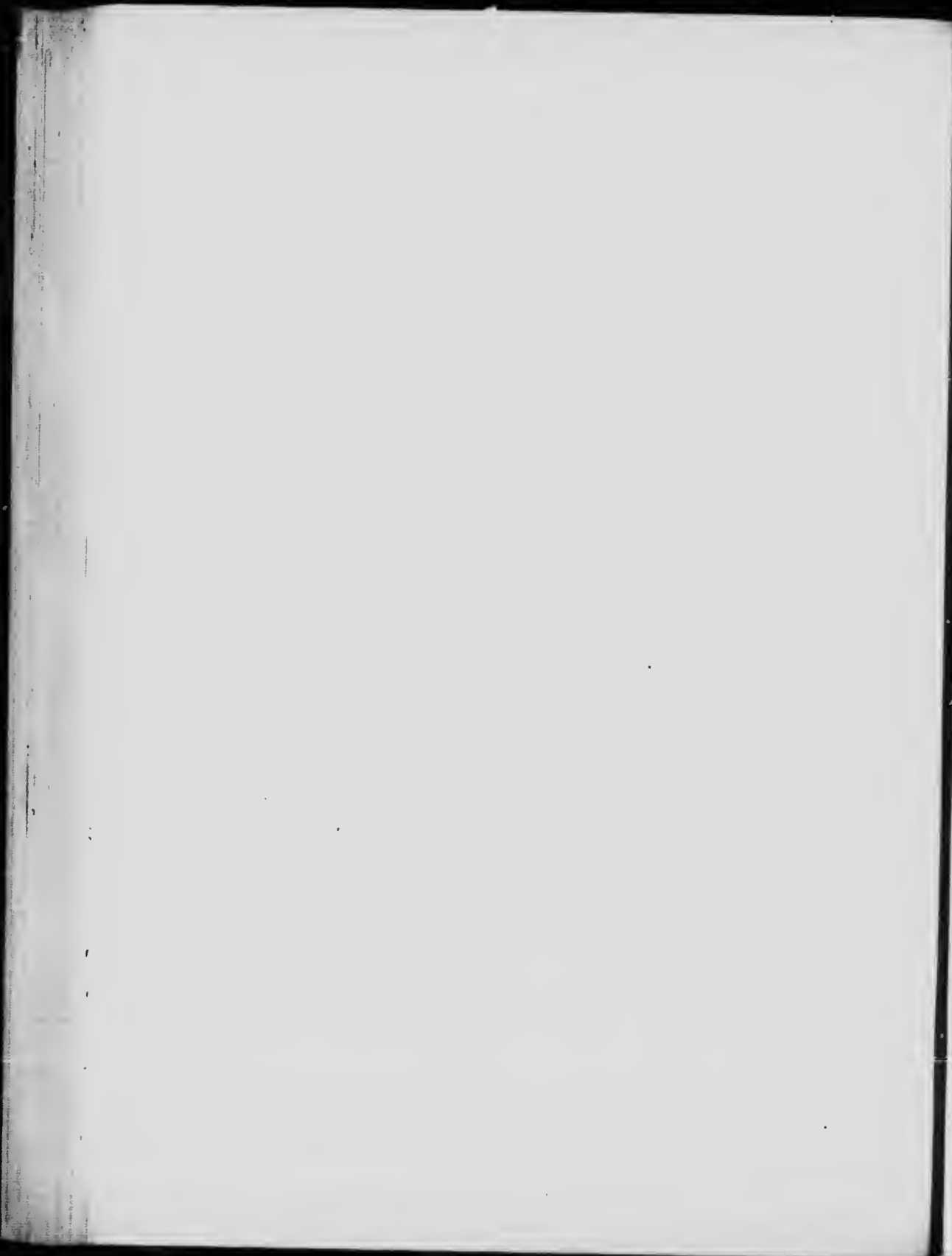
That was a happy family from beginning to end. No accident ever befell it; no enemy disturbed its peace. And when the young birds had flown away to the South, I took down the nest which I had helped to build, and hung it in my study as a souvenir of my bright little neighbors.





# ONE TOUCH OF NATURE





## ONE TOUCH OF NATURE



THE cheery whistle of a quail recalls to most New England people a vision of breezy upland pastures, with a mottled brown bird calling melodiously from the topmost slanting rail of the old sheep-fence. Farmers say he foretells the weather, calling, *More-wet; much-more-wet!* Boys say he only proclaims his name, *Bob White! I'm Bob White!* But whether he prognosticates or introduces himself, his voice is always a welcome one. Those who know the call listen with pleasure, and speedily come to love the bird that makes it.



Bob White has another call, more beautiful than his boyish whistle, which comparatively few have heard. It is a soft, liquid yodeling, which the male bird uses to call the scattered flock together. One who walks in the woods at sunset sometimes hears it from a tangle of grapevine and bullbrier. If he has the patience to push his way carefully through the underbrush, he may see the beautiful Bob on a rock or stump, uttering the softest and most musical of whistles. He is telling his flock that here is a nice place he has found, where they can spend the night and be safe from owls and prowling foxes.

If the watcher be very patient and still, he will presently hear the pattering of tiny feet on the leaves, and see the brown birds come running in from every direction. Once in a lifetime, perhaps, he may see them gather in a close circle — tails together, heads out, like the spokes of a wheel, and so go to sleep for the night. Their soft whistlings and chirpings at such times form the most delightful sound one ever hears in the woods.

This call of the male bird is not difficult to imitate. Hunters use it occasionally to call a scattered covey together, or to locate the male birds, which generally answer the leader's call. I have frequently called a flock of the birds into a thicket at sunset, and caught running glimpses of them as they hurried about, looking for the bugler who called taps.

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*One Touch of Nature*



All this occurred to me, late one afternoon, in the great





*One Touch  
of  
Nature*

Zoölogical Gardens at Antwerp. I was watching a yard of birds—three or four hundred representatives of the pheasant family, from all over the earth, that were running about among the rocks and artificial copses. Some were almost as wild as if in their native woods; others had grown tame from being constantly fed by visitors.

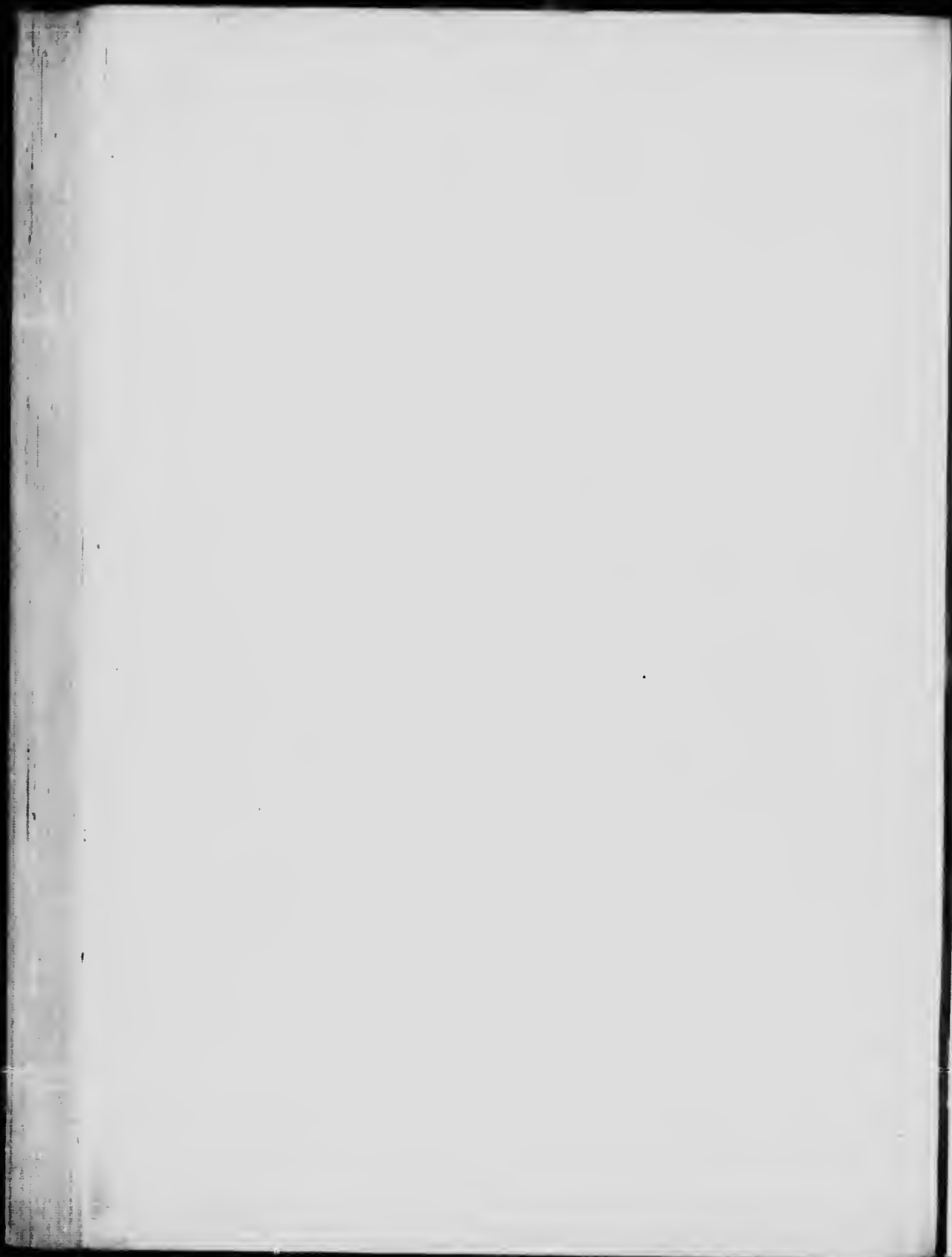
It was rather confusing to a bird lover, familiar only with home birds, to see all the strange forms and colors in the grass, and to hear a chorus of unknown notes from trees and underbrush. But suddenly there was a touch of naturalness. That beautiful brown bird with the shapely body and the quick, nervous run,—no one could mistake him; it was Bob White. And with him came a flash of the dear New England landscape three thousand miles away. Another and another showed himself and was gone. Then I thought of the woods at sunset, and began to call softly.

The carnivora were being fed not far away; a frightful uproar came from the cages. The coughing roar of a male lion



Uttering the softest and most musical of whistles





made the air shiver. Cockatoos screamed; noisy parrots squawked hideously. Children were playing and shouting near by. In the yard itself fifty birds were singing or crying strange notes. Besides all this, the quail I had seen had been hatched far from home, under a strange mother. So I had little hope of success.

But as the call grew louder and louder, a liquid yodel came like an electric shock from a clump of bushes on the left. There he was, looking, listening. Another call, and he came running toward me. Others appeared from every direction, and soon a score of quail were running about, just inside the screen, with soft gurglings like a hidden brook, doubly delightful to an ear that had longed to hear them.

City, gardens, beasts, strangers, — all vanished in an instant. I was a boy in the fields again. The rough New England hillside grew tender and beautiful in the sunset light; the hollows were rich in autumn glory. The pasture brook sang on its way to the river; a robin called from a crimson



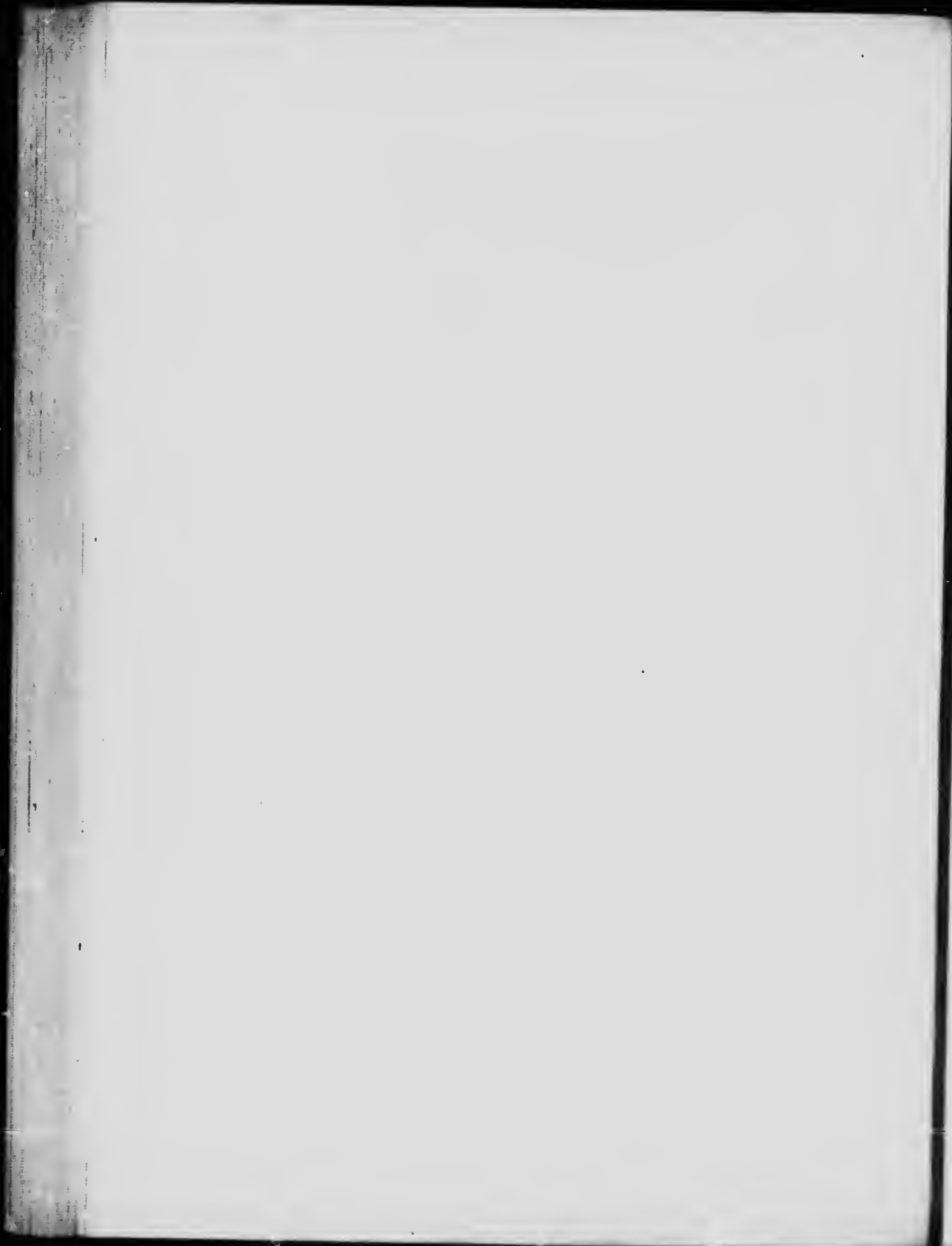
maple; and all around was the low, thrilling whistle and the patter of welcome feet on leaves, as Bob White came running again to meet his countryman.



g  
on  
to

# KOSKOMENOS THE OUTCAST







**K**OSKOMENOS the kingfisher is an outcast among the birds. I think they regard him as a half-reptile, who has not yet climbed high enough in the bird scale to deserve recognition; so they let him severely alone. Even the goshawk hesitates before taking a swoop at him, not knowing whether the gaudy creature is dangerous or only uncanny. I saw a great hawk once drop like a bolt upon a kingfisher that hung on quivering wings, rattling softly, before his hole in the bank. But the robber lost his nerve at the instant when he should have dropped his



claws to strike. He swerved aside and shot upward in a great slant to a dead spruce top, where he stood watching intently till the dark beak of a brooding kingfisher reached out of the hole to receive the fish that her mate had brought her. Whereupon Koskomenos swept away to his watchtower above the minnow pool, and the hawk set his wings toward the outlet, where a brood of young sheldrakes were taking their first lessons in the open water.

No wonder the birds look askance at Kingfisher. His head is ridiculously large; his feet ridiculously small. He is a poem of grace in the air; but he creeps like a lizard, or waddles like a duck in the rare moments when he is afoot. His mouth is big enough to take in a minnow whole; his tongue so small that he has no voice, but only a harsh *klr-r-r-r-ik-ik-ik*, like a watchman's rattle. He builds no nest, but rather a den in the bank, in which he lives most filthily half the day; yet the other half he is a clean, beautiful creature, with never a suggestion of earth, but only of the blue heavens above and the

color-steeped water below, in his bright garments. Water will not wet him, though he plunge a dozen times beneath the surface. His clatter is harsh, noisy, diabolical; yet his plunge into the stream, with its flash of color, its silver spray, and its tinkle of smitten water, is the most musical thing in the wilderness.

As a fisherman he has no equal. His fishy, expressionless eye is yet the keenest that sweeps the water, and his swoop puts even the fish-hawk to shame for its certainty and its lightning quickness.

Besides all these contradictions, he is solitary, unknown, inapproachable. He has no youth, no play, no joy except to eat; he associates with nobody, not even with his own kind; and when he catches a fish, and beats it against a limb till it is dead, and sits with head back-tilted, swallowing his prey, with a clattering chuckle deep down in his throat, a suspicion creeps over you, as you watch, that the birds are right in casting him out; that there is too much lizard still left in him to class him properly among the fowls of the air.

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It is this uncanny mixture of bird and reptile that has made the kingfisher an object of superstition among all savage peoples. The legends about him are legion; his crested head is prized above all others by savages as a charm or fetish; and even among civilized peoples his dried body may still sometimes be seen hanging to a pole, in the belief that his bill will point out the quarter from which the next wind will blow.

But Koskomenos has another side; though the world, as yet, has found out little about it. One day, in the wilderness, I cheered him quite involuntarily. It was late afternoon; the fishing was over, and I sat in my canoe watching for anything that might come along. Across the stream was a clay bank, near the top of which a dark hole showed where a pair of kingfishers had dug their long tunnel. "There is nothing for them to stand on there; how did they begin that hole?" I wondered lazily; "and how can they ever raise a brood, with an open door like that for mink and weasel to enter?" Here were two new problems to add to the

many unsolved ones which meet you at every turn on the woodland byways.

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A movement under the shore stopped my wondering, and the long lithe form of a hunting mink shot swiftly up stream. Under the hole he stopped, raised himself with his fore paws against the bank, twisting his head from side to side and sniffing nervously. "Something good up there," he thought, and began to climb. But the bank was sheer and soft; he slipped back half a dozen times without rising two feet. Then he went down stream to a point where some roots gave him a foothold, and ran lightly up till under the dark eaves that threw their shadowy roots over the clay bank. There he crept cautiously along till his nose found the nest, when he slipped down and rested his fore paws on the threshold. A long sniff of the rank fishy odor that pours out of a kingfisher's den, a keen look all around to be sure the old birds were not returning, and he vanished like a shadow.

"There is one brood of kingfishers the less," I thought, with my glasses focused on

*Koskomenos  
the Outcast*



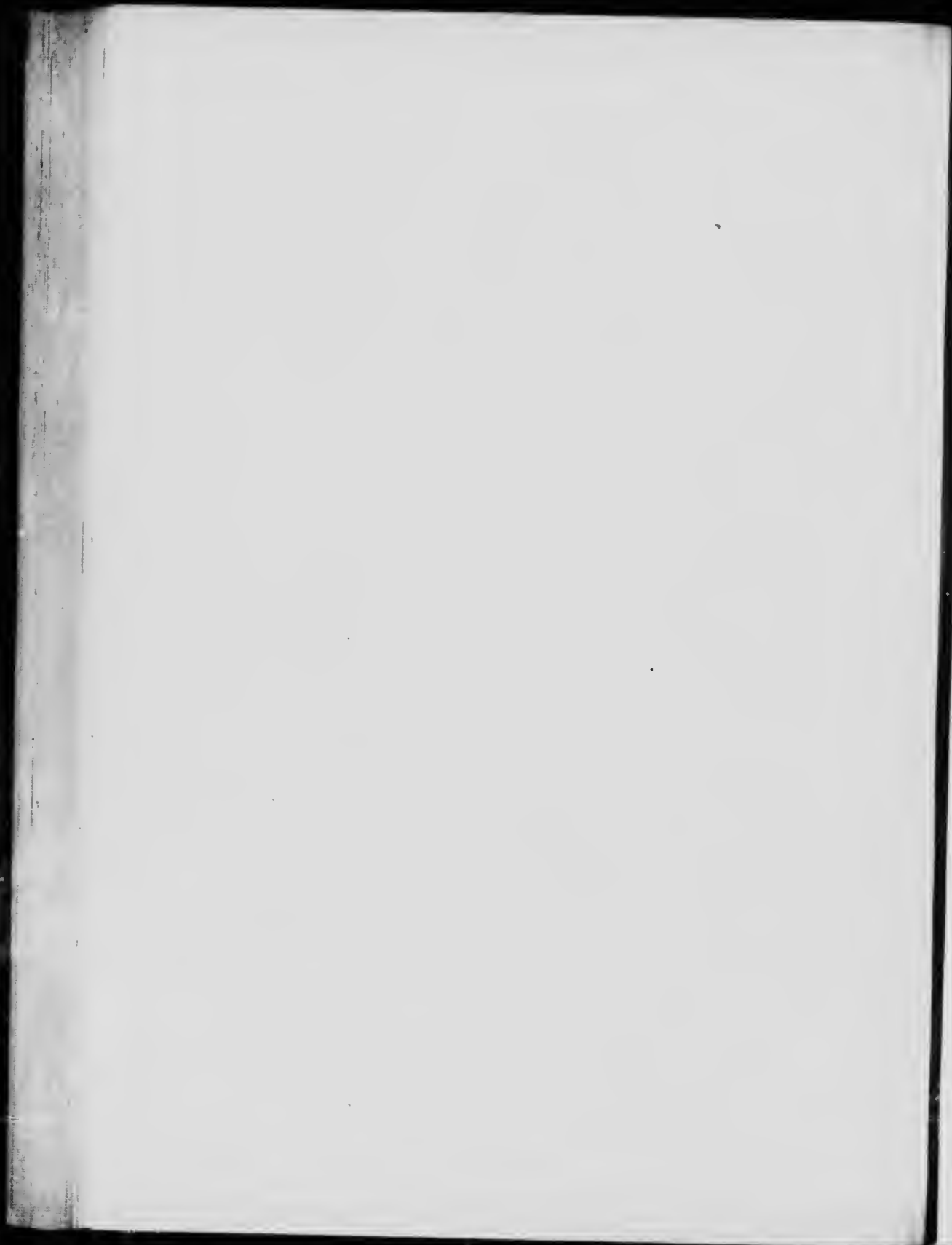


the hole. But scarcely was the thought formed when a fierce rumbling clatter sounded in the bank. The mink shot out, a streak of red showing plainly across his brown face. After him came a kingfisher, clattering out a storm of invectives, and aiding his progress by vicious jabs at his rear. He had made a miscalculation that time; the old mother bird was at home waiting for him, and drove her powerful beak at his evil eye the moment it appeared at the inner end of the tunnel. That took the longing for your g kingfisher all out of Cheokhes. He plunged headlong down the bank, the bird swooping after him with a rattling alarm that brought another kingfisher in a twinkling. The mink dived, but it was useless to attempt escape in that way; the keen eyes above followed his flight perfectly. When he came to the surface, twenty feet away, both birds were over him and dropped like plummets on his head. So they drove him down stream and out of sight.

Years afterward I solved the second problem suggested by the kingfisher's den, when



So they drove him down stream and out of sight



I had the good fortune, one day, to watch a pair beginning their tunneling. All who have ever watched the bird have, no doubt, noticed his wonderful ability to stop short in swift flight and hold himself poised in mid-air for an indefinite time, while watching the movements of a minnow beneath. They make use of this ability in beginning their nest on a bank so steep as to afford no foothold.

As I watched the pair referred to, first one then the other would hover before the point selected, as a humming bird balances for a moment at the door of a trumpet flower to be sure that no one is watching ere he goes in, then drive his beak with rapid plunges into the bank, sending down a continuous shower of clay to the river below. In a remarkably short time they had a foothold and proceeded to dig themselves in out of sight.

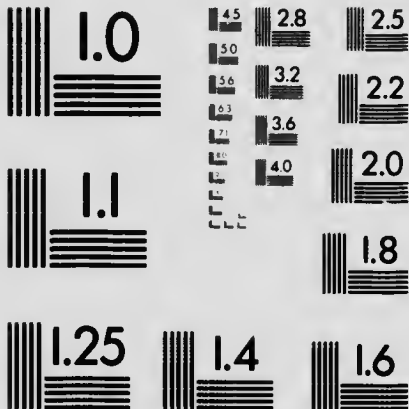
Kingfisher's tunnel is so narrow that he cannot turn around in it. His straight, strong bill loosens the earth; his tiny feet throw it out behind. I would see a shower





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of dirt, and perchance the tail of Koskomenos for a brief instant, then a period of waiting, and another shower. This kept up till the tunnel was bored perhaps two feet, when they undoubtedly made a sharp turn, as is their custom. After that they brought most of the earth out in their beaks. While one worked, the other watched, or fished at the minnow pool, so that there was steady progress as long as I observed them.

A curious thing about these birds, which you may see for yourself on any wilderness river, is that each pair of kingfishers have their own particular pools, over which they exercise unquestioned lordship. There may be a dozen pairs of birds on a single stream; but, so far as I have been able to observe, each family has a certain stretch of water on which no other kingfishers are allowed to fish. They may pass up and down freely, but they never stop at the minnow pools; or, if they are caught watching near them, they are promptly driven out by the rightful owners. The same thing is true on the lake shores. Whether there is some secret understanding

and partition among them, or whether (which is more likely) their right consists in discovery or first arrival, there is no means of knowing.

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the Outcast*



I had not half settled this matter of the division of trout streams when another observation came, which was utterly unexpected. Koskomenos, half reptile though he seem, not only recognizes riparian rights, but he is also capable of friendship—and that, too, for a moody prowler of the wilderness whom no one else cares anything about. Here is the proof. —

I was out in my canoe alone, looking for a loon's nest, one midsummer day, when the fresh tracks of a bull caribou drew me to shore. The trail led straight from the water to a broad alder belt; beyond which, on the hillside, I might find the big brute loafing his time away till evening should come, and watch him to see what he would do with himself.

As I turned shoreward, a kingfisher sounded his rattle and came darting across the mouth of the bay where Hukweem the

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loon had hidden her two eggs. I watched him, admiring the rippling sweep of his flight, like the run of a cat's-paw breeze across a sleeping lake, and the clear blue of his crest against the deeper blue of summer sky. Under him his reflection rippled along, like the rush of a gorgeous fish through the glassy water. Opposite my canoe he checked himself, poised an instant in mid-air, watching the minnows that my paddle had disturbed, and dropped bill first — *plash!* with a silvery tinkle in the sound, as if hidden bells down among the green water weeds had been set to ringing by this sprite of the air. A shower of spray caught the rainbow for a brief instant; the ripples gathered and began to dance over the spot where Koskomenos had gone down, when they were scattered rudely again as he burst out among them with his fish. He swept back to the stub whence he had come, chuckling on the way. There he whacked his fish soundly on the wood, threw his head back, and through the glass I saw the tail of a minnow

wriggling slowly down the road that has for him no turning. Then I took up the caribou trail.

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I had gone nearly through the alders, following the course of a little brook and stealing along without a sound, when behind me I heard the kingfisher coming above the alders, rattling as if possessed, *klrrr! klrrr! klrrr-ik-ik-ik!* On the instant there was a heavy plunge and splash just ahead, and the swift rush of some large animal up the hillside. Over me poised the kingfisher, looking down first at me, then ahead at the unknown beast, till the crashing ceased in a faint rustle far away; when he swept back to his fishing-stub, clacking and chuckling immoderately.

I pushed cautiously ahead and came presently to a beautiful pool, below a rock, where the hillside shelved gently towards the alders. From the numerous tracks and the look of the place, I knew instantly that I had stumbled upon a bear's bathing pool. The water was still troubled; huge tracks, all sippy and broken, led up the hillside in big jumps; the



moss was torn, the underbrush spattered with shining water drops. "No room for doubt here," I thought; "Mooween was asleep in this pool, and the kingfisher woke him up — but why? and did he do it on purpose?"

I remembered suddenly a record in an old notebook, which reads: "Sugarloaf Lake, 26 July. — Tried to stalk a bear this noon. No luck. He was nosing alongshore and I had a perfect chance; but a kingfisher scared him." I began to wonder how the rattle of a kingfisher, which is one of the commonest sounds on wilderness waters, could scare a bear, who knows all the sounds of the wilderness perfectly. Perhaps Koskomenos has an alarm note and uses it for a friend in time of need, as gulls go out of their way to alarm a flock of sleeping ducks when danger is approaching.

Here was a new trait, a touch of the human in this unknown, clattering suspect of the fishing streams. I resolved to watch him with keener interest.

Somewhere above me, deep in the tangle of the summer wilderness, Mooween stood



watching his back track, eyes, ears, and nose alert to discover what the creature was who dared frighten him out of his noonday bath. It would be senseless to attempt to surprise him now; besides, I had no weapon of any kind. — "To-morrow, about this time, I shall be coming back; then look out, Mooween," I thought, as I marked the place and stole away to my canoe.

But the next day, when I came to the place, creeping along the upper edge of the alders so as to make no noise, the pool was clear and quiet, as if nothing but the little trout that hid under the foam bubbles had ever disturbed its peace. Koskomenos was clattering about the bay below, as usual. Spite of my precaution he had seen me enter the alders; but he gave me no attention whatever. He went on with his fishing as if he knew perfectly that the bear had deserted his bathing pool.

It was nearly a month before I again camped on the beautiful lake. Summer was gone. All her warmth and more than her fragrant beauty still lingered on forest and



river; but the drowsiness had gone from the atmosphere, and the haze had crept into it. Here and there birches and maples flung out their gorgeous banners of autumn over the silent water. A tingle came into the evening air; the lake's breath lay heavy and white in the twilight stillness; birds and beasts became suddenly changed as they entered the brief period of sport and of full feeding.

I was drifting about a reedy bay (the same bay in which the almost forgotten kingfisher had cheated me out of my bear, after eating a minnow that my paddle had routed out for him) shooting frogs for my table with a pocket rifle. How different it was here, I reflected, from the woods about home. There the game was already harried; the report of a gun set every living creature skulking. Here the crack of my little rifle was no more heeded than the plunge of a fish-hawk, or the groaning of a burdened elm bough. A score of fat woodcock lay unheeding in that bit of alder tangle yonder, the ground bored like a colander after their

night's feeding. Up on the burned hillside the partridges said, *Kwit, kwit!* when I appeared, and jumped to a tree and craned their necks to see what I was. The black ducks skulked in the reeds. They were full-grown now and strong of wing, but the early hiding habit was not yet broken up by shooting. They would glide through the sedges, and double the bogs, and crouch in a tangle till the canoe was almost upon them, when with a h and a frightened *hark-ark!* they shot into the air and away to the river. The mink, changing from brown to black, gave up his nest-robbing for honest hunting, undismayed by trap or deadfall; and, up in the inlet, I could see grassy domes rising above the bronze ~~and~~ of the marsh, where Musquash was building thick and high for winter cold and spring floods. Truly it was good to be here, and to enter for a brief hour into the shy, wild, but unharried life of the wood folk.

A big bullfrog showed his head among the lily pads, and the little rifle, unmindful of the joys of an unharried existence, rose slowly to

*Koskomenos*  
*the Outcast*







its place. My eye was glancing along the sights when a sudden movement in the alders on the shore, above and beyond the unconscious head of Chigwooltz the frog, spared him for a little season to his lily pads and his minnow hunting. At the same moment a kingfisher went rattling by to his old perch over the minnow pool. The alders swayed again as if struck; a huge bear lumbered out of them to the shore, with a disgruntled *woof!* at some twig that had switched his ear too sharply.

I slid lower in the canoe till only my head and shoulders were visible. Mooween went nosing alongshore till something—a dead fish or a mussel bed—touched his appetite, when he stopped and began feeding, scarcely two hundred yards away. I reached first for my heavy rifle, then for the paddle, and cautiously “fanned” the canoe towards shore till an old stump covered my approach. Then the little bark jumped forward as if alive. But I had scarcely started when — *klrrrr! klrrrr! ik-ik-ik!* Over my head swept Koskomenos with a rush of wings

and an alarm cry that spoke only of haste and danger. I had a glimpse of the bear plunging into the alders, as if thrown by a catapult; the kingfisher wheeled in a great rattling circle about the canoe before he pitched upon the old stump, jerking his tail and clattering in great excitement.

I swung noiselessly out into the lake, where I could watch the alders. They were all still for a space of ten minutes; but Mooween was there, I knew, sniffing and listening. Then a great snake seemed

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to be wriggling through the bushes, making no sound, but showing a wavy line of quivering tops as he went.

Down the shore, a little way, was a higher point, with a fallen tree that commanded a view of half the lake. I had stood there a few days before, while watching to determine the air paths and lines of flight that shel-drakes use in passing up and down the lake, — for birds have runways, or rather flyways, just as foxes do. Mooween evidently knew the spot; the alders showed that he was heading straight for it, to look out on the lake and see what the alarm was about. As yet he had no idea what peril had threatened him; though, like all wild creatures, he had obeyed the first clang of a danger note on the instant. Not a creature in the woods, from Mooween down to Tookhees the wood mouse, but has learned from experience that, in matters of this kind, it is well to jump to cover first and investigate afterwards.

I paddled swiftly to the point, landed and crept to a rock from which I could just see the fallen tree. Mooween was coming. "My

bear this time," I thought, as a twig snapped faintly. Then Koskomenos swept into the woods, hovering over the brush, looking down and rattling — *Klrrr-ik, clear out! klrrr-ik, clear out!* There was a heavy rush, such as a bear always makes when alarmed; Koskomenos swept back to his perch; and I sought the shore, half inclined to make my next hunting more even-chanced by disposing of one meddlesome factor. "You wretched, noisy, clattering meddler!" I muttered, the front sight of my rifle resting fair on the blue back of Koskomenos, "that is the third time you have spoiled my shot, and you won't have another chance. — But wait; who is the meddler here?"

Slowly the bent finger relaxed on the trigger. A loon went floating by the point, all unconscious of danger, with a rippling wake that sent silver reflections glinting across the lake's deep blue. Far overhead soared an eagle, breeze-borne in wide circles, looking down on his own wide domain, unheeding the man's intrusion. Nearer, a red squirrel barked down his resentment from a giant





spruce trunk. On my left a heavy splash and a wild, free tumult of quacking told where the black ducks were coming in, as they had done, undisturbed, for generations. Behind me a long roll echoed through the woods — some young cock partridge, whom the warm sun had beguiled into drumming his spring love call. From the mountain-side a cow moose rolled back a startling answer. Close at hand, yet seeming miles away, a chipmunk was *chunking* sleepily in the sunshine; while a nest of young wood mice were calling their mother in the grass at my feet. And every wild sound did but deepen the vast, wondrous silence of the wilderness.

“After all, what place has the roar of a rifle or the smell of sulphurous powder in the midst of all this blessed peace?” I asked half sadly. As if in answer, the kingfisher dropped with his musical plash, and swept back with exultant rattle to his watchtower. — “Go on with your clatter and your fishing, Koskomenos. ‘The wilderness and the solitary place shall still be glad’ for you and

Mooween, and the trout pools would be lonely without you. But I wish you knew that your life lay, a moment ago, in the bend of my finger; and that some one, besides the bear, appreciates your brave warning."

Then I went back to the point to measure the tracks, and to estimate how big the bear was, and to console myself with the thought of how I would certainly have had him, if something had not interfered — which is the philosophy of all hunters since Esau.

A few days later the chance came of repaying Koskomenos with coals of fire. The lake surface was still warm; no storms nor frosts had cooled it. The big trout had risen from the deep places, but were not yet quickened enough to take my flies; so, trout hungry, I was trolling for them with a minnow. I had taken two good fish, and was moving slowly by the mouth of the bay, Simmo at the paddle, when a suspicious movement on the shore attracted my attention. I passed the line to Simmo, the better to use my glasses, and was scanning the alders sharply, when a cry of wonder came from the





Indian. "O, bah cosh, see! das second time I catch-um, Koskomenos." And there, twenty feet above the lake, a young kingfisher — one of Koskomenos' frowzy-headed, wild-eyed youngsters — was whirling wildly at the end of my line. He had seen the minnow trailing a hundred feet astern and, with more hunger than discretion, had swooped for it promptly. Simmo, feeling the tug but seeing nothing behind him, had struck promptly, and the hook went home.



I seized the line and began to pull in gently. The young kingfisher came most unwillingly, with a continuous clatter of protest that speedily brought Koskomenos and his mate, and two or three of the captive's brethren. They showed no lack of courage, but swooped again and again at the line, and even at the man who held it. In a moment I had the youngster in my

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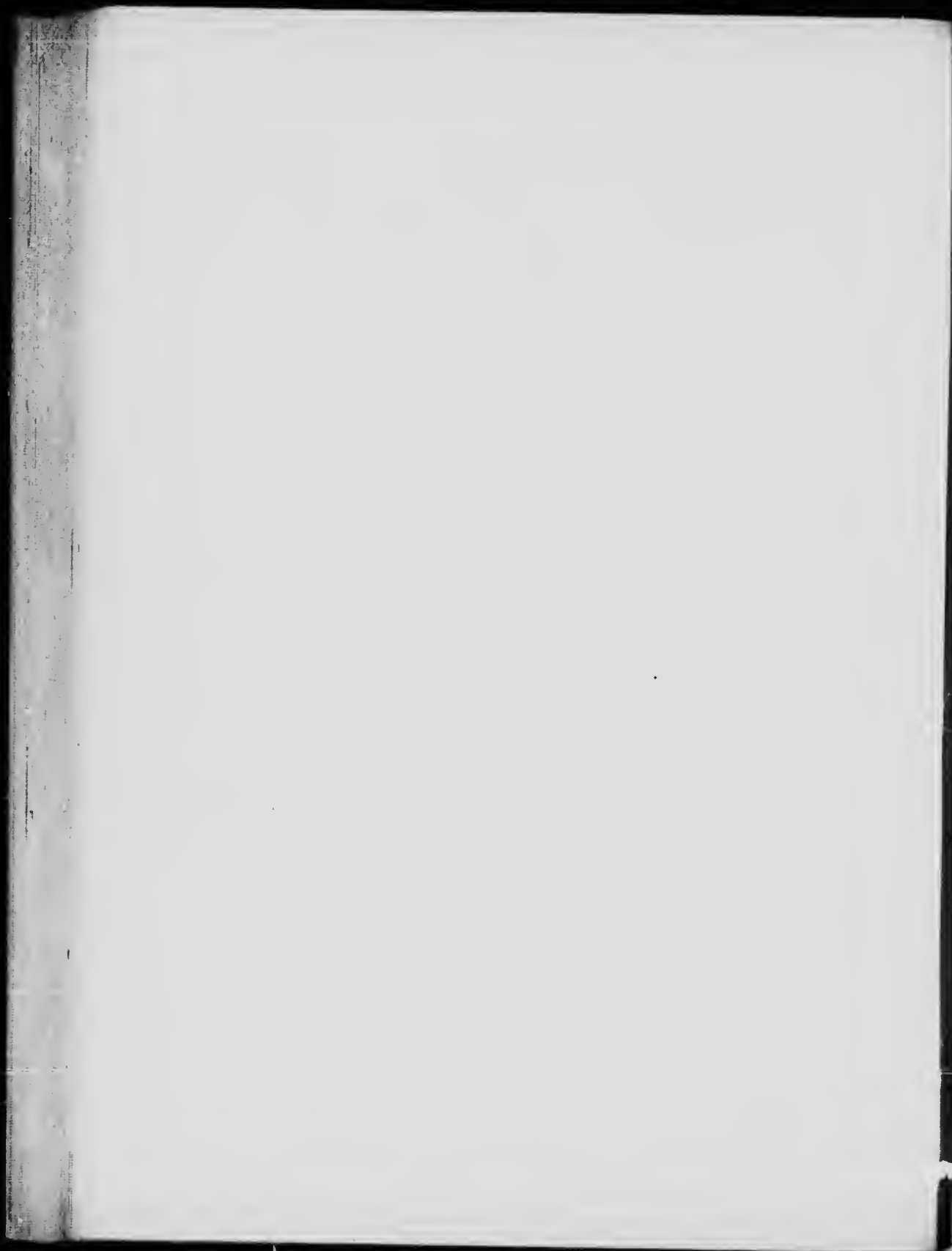
hand, and had disengaged the hook. He was not hurt at all, but terribly frightened; so I held him a little while, enjoying the excitement of the others, whom the captive's rattle kept circling wildly about the canoe. It was noteworthy that not another bird heeded the cry or came near. Even in distress they refused to recognize the outcast. Then, as Koskomenos hovered on quivering wings just over my head, I tossed the captive close up beside him. "There, Koskomenos, take your young chuckle-head, and teach him better wisdom. Next time you see me stalking a bear, please go on with your fishing."

But there was no note of gratitude in the noisy babel that swept up the bay after the kingfishers. When I saw them again, they were sitting on a dead branch, five of them in a row, chuckling and clattering all at once, unmindful of the minnows that played beneath them. I have no doubt that, in their own way, they were telling each other all about it.

*Koskomenos  
the Outcast*

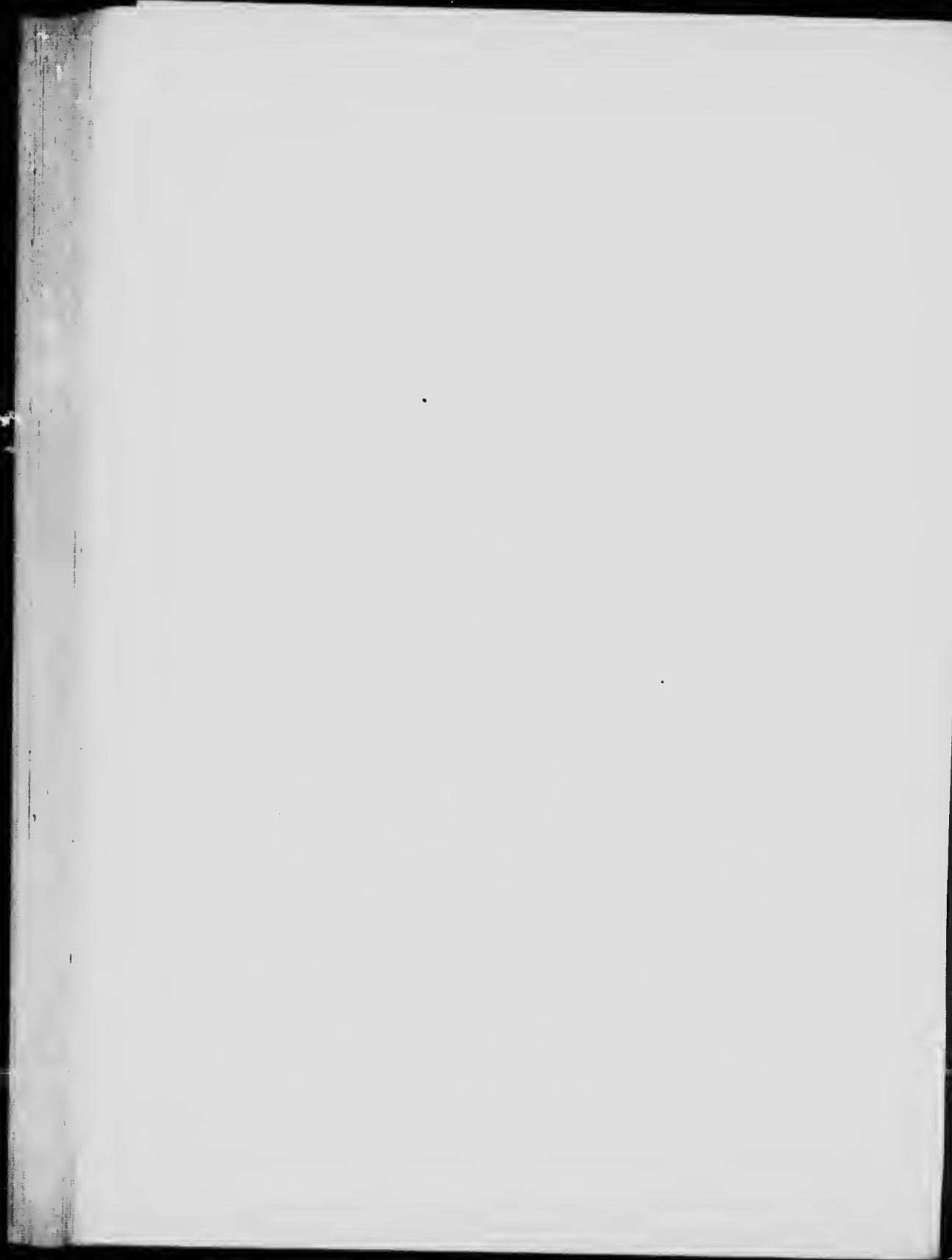






# A FELLOW OF EXPEDIENTS





## A FELLOW OF EXPEDIENTS



**A**MONG the birds there is one whose personal appearance is rapidly changing. He illustrates in his present life a process well known historically to all naturalists, *viz.*, the modification of form resulting from changed environment. I refer to the golden-winged woodpecker, perhaps the most beautifully marked bird of the North, whose names are as varied as his habits and accomplishments.

Nature intended him to get his living, as do the other woodpeckers, by boring into old trees and stumps for the insects that live on the decaying wood. For this purpose she gave him the straight, sharp, wedge-shaped bill, just calculated for cutting out chips; the long horn-tipped tongue, for thrusting into the holes he makes; the peculiar



arrangement of toes, two forward and two back; and the stiff, spiny tail-feathers for supporting himself against the side of a tree as he works. But getting his living so, as Nature intended, means hard work; and he has discovered for himself a much easier way. One now frequently surprises him on the ground, in old pastures and orchards, bounding about rather awkwardly (for his little feet were never intended for walking) after the crickets and grasshoppers that abound there. Still he finds the work of catching them much easier than boring into dry old trees, and the insects themselves much larger and more satisfactory.

A single glance will show how much this new way of living has changed him from the other woodpeckers. The bill is no longer straight, but has a decided curve, like the thrush's; and instead of the chisel-shaped edge there is a rounded point. The red tuft on the head, which marks all the woodpecker family, would be too conspicuous on the ground. In its place we find a red crescent well down on the neck, and partially hidden

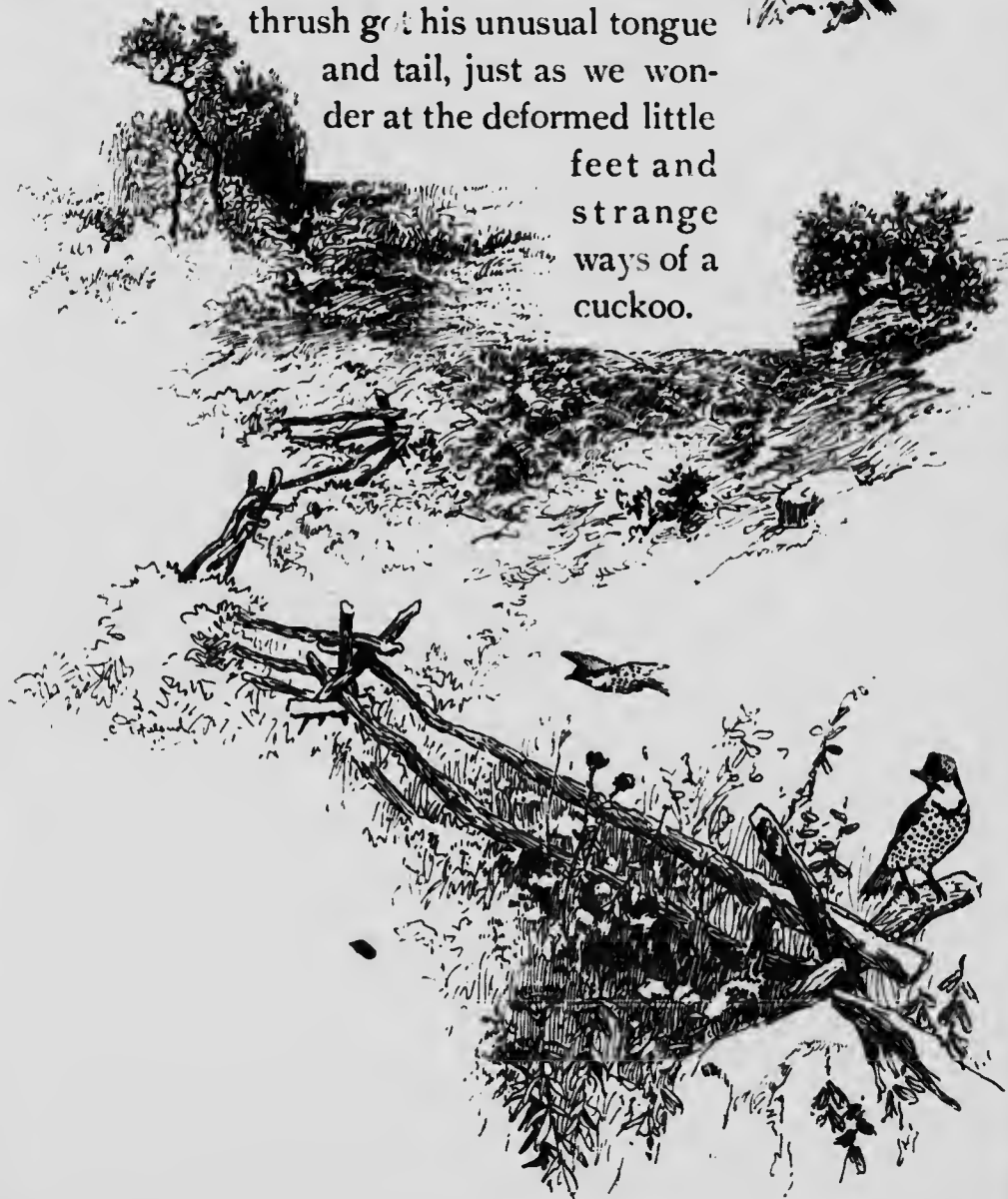
by the short gray feathers about it. The point of the tongue is less horny, and from the stiff points of the tail-feathers laminæ are beginning to grow, making them more like other birds'. A future generation will undoubtedly wonder where this peculiar kind of

thrush got his unusual tongue and tail, just as we wonder at the deformed little

feet and strange ways of a cuckoo.

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The habits of this bird are a curious compound of his old life in the woods and his new preference for the open fields and farms. Sometimes the nest is in the very heart of the woods, where the bird glides in and out, silent as a crow in nesting time. His feeding place meanwhile may be an old pasture half a mile away, where he calls loudly, and frolics about as if he had never a care or a fear in the world. But the nest is now more frequently in a wild orchard, where the bird finds a knot-hole and digs down through the soft wood, making a deep nest with very little trouble. When the knot-hole is not well situated, he finds a decayed limb and drills through the outer hard shell, then digs down a foot or more through the soft wood, and makes a nest. In this nest the rain never troubles him, for he very providently drills the entrance on the underside of the limb.

Like many other birds, he has discovered that the farmer is his friend. Occasionally, therefore, he neglects to build a deep nest, simply hollowing out an old knot-hole, and

depending on the presence of man for protection from hawks and owls. At such times the bird soon learns to recognize those who belong in the orchard, and loses the extreme shyness that characterizes him at all other times.

Once a farmer, knowing my interest in birds, invited me to come and see a golden-winged woodpecker, which in her confidence had built so shallow a nest that she could be seen sitting on the eggs like a robin. The moment we crossed the wall, within sight of the nest, the bird slipped away out of the orchard. Wishing to test her, we withdrew and waited till she returned. Then the farmer passed within a few feet without disturbing her in the least. Ten minutes later I followed him, and the bird flew away again as I crossed the wall.

The notes of the golden-wing — much more varied and musical than those of other woodpeckers — are probably the results of his new free life, and the modified tongue and bill. In the woods one seldom hears from him anything but a rattling tattoo, as he

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hammers away on a dry old pine stub. As a rule he seems to do this more for the noise it makes, and the exercise of his abilities, than because he expects to find insects; except in winter time, when he goes back to his old ways. But out in the field he has a variety of notes. Sometimes it is a loud *kee-úk!* like the scream of a blue jay divided into two syllables, with the accent on the last. Again it is a cheery whistling call, of very short notes run close together, with accent on every other one. Again he teeters up and down on the end of a fence rail, with a rollicking *cekoo, cekoo, cekoo*, that sounds more like a laugh than anything else among the birds.

A curious habit, which the bird has adopted with advancing civilization, is that of providing himself with a sheltered sleeping place from the storms and cold of winter, instead of migrating to the South. Late in the fall he finds a deserted building, and after a great deal of shy inspection, to satisfy himself that no one is within, drills a hole through the side. He has then a comfortable place to

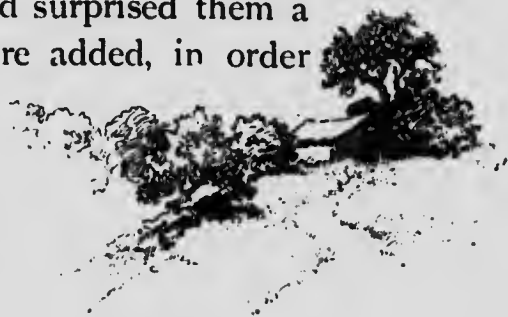
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sleep, and an abundance of decaying wood in which to hunt insects on stormy days. An ice-house is a favorite location for him, the warm sawdust furnishing a good burrowing place for a nest or sleeping room. When a building is used as a winter resort, the bird very cunningly drills the entrance close up under the eaves, where it is sheltered from storms, and at the same time out of sight of all prying eyes.

During the winter several birds often occupy one building together. I know of one old deserted barn where, last year, five of the birds lived very peaceably together. At almost any hour of the day, if one approached cautiously and thumped the side of the barn, some of the birds would dash out in great alarm, never stopping to look behind them. At first there were but three entrances; but after I had surprised them a few times, two more were added, in order to get out more quickly when all were inside.

Two things about my family in the old barn





aroused my curiosity — what they were doing there by day, and how they got out so quickly when alarmed. The only way it seemed possible for them to dash out on the instant, as they did, was to fly straight through. But the holes were too small, and no bird but a bank-swallow would have attempted such a thing.

One day I drove the birds out, then crawled in under a sill on the opposite side, and hid in a corner of the loft. It was a long wait in the stuffy old place before one of the birds came back. I heard him light first on the roof; then his little head appeared at one of the holes, as he sat just below, against the side of the barn, looking and listening before coming in. Quite satisfied, after a minute or two, that nobody was inside, he scrambled in and flew down to a corner in which was a lot of old hay and rubbish. Here he began a great rustle and stirring about, like a squirrel in autumn leaves, probably after insects, though it was too dark to see just what he was doing. It sounded part of the time as if he were scratching aside the hay,

much as a hen would have done. If so, his two little front toes must have made sad work of it, with the two hind ones always getting doubled up in the way. When I thumped a board suddenly, he hurled himself like a shot at one of the holes, lighting just below it. I could hear plainly the thump of his little feet as he struck. With the same movement, and without pausing an instant, he dived through headlong, aided by a spring from his tail, much as a jumping-jack goes over the head of his stick, only much more rapidly. Hardly had he gone before another appeared, to go through the same program.

Though much shyer than other birds of the farm, he often ventures up close to the house in the early morning, before any one is stirring. One spring morning I was awakened by a strange little pattering sound, and, opening my eyes, was astonished to see one of these birds on the sash of the open window, within five feet of my hand. Half closing my eyes, I kept very still and watched. Just in front of him, on the bureau, was a stuffed golden-wing, with wings and tail spread to

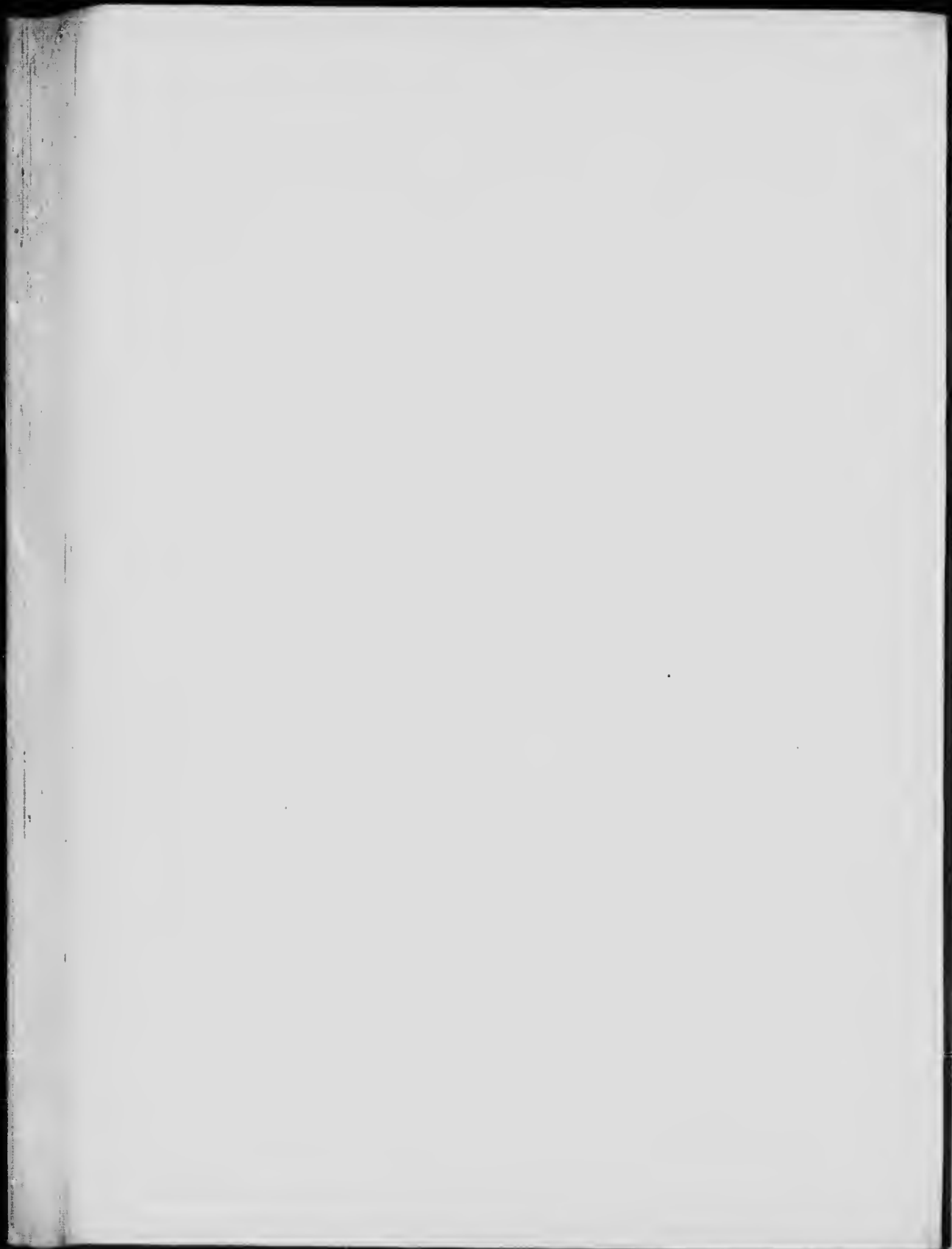
*A Fellow of Expedients*

show the beautiful plumage. He had seen it in flying by, and now stood hopping back and forth along the window sash, uncertain whether to come in or not. Sometimes he spread his wings, as if on the point of flying in; then he would turn his head to look curiously at me and at the strange surroundings, and, afraid to venture in, endeavor to attract the attention of the stuffed bird, whose head was turned away. In the looking-glass he saw his own movements repeated. Twice he began his love call very softly, but cut it short, as if frightened. The echo of the small room made it seem so different from the same call in the open fields that I think he doubted even his own voice.

Almost over his head, on a bracket against the wall, was a great hawk, pitched forward on his perch, with wings spread and fierce eyes glaring downward, in the intense attitude a hawk takes as he swoops for his prey. The golden-wing by this time was ready to venture in. He had leaned forward with wings spread, looking down at me to be quite sure I was harmless, when, turning his head



He caught sight of the hawk just ready to pounce down on him



for a final look round, he caught sight of the hawk just ready to pounce down on him. With a startled *kee-uk!* he fairly tumbled back off the window sash, and I caught one glimpse of him as he dashed round the corner in full flight.

What were his impressions, I wonder, as he sat on a limb of the old apple tree and thought it all over? Do birds have romances? How much greater wonders had he seen than those of any romance! And do they have any means of communicating them, as they sing their love songs? What a wonderful story he could tell, a real story, of a magic palace full of strange wonders; of a glittering bit of air that made him see himself; of a giant, all in white, with only his head visible; of an enchanted beauty, stretching her wings in mute supplication for some brave knight to touch her and break the spell; while on high a fierce dragon-hawk kept watch, ready to eat up any one who should dare enter!

And of course none of the birds would believe him. He would have to spend the

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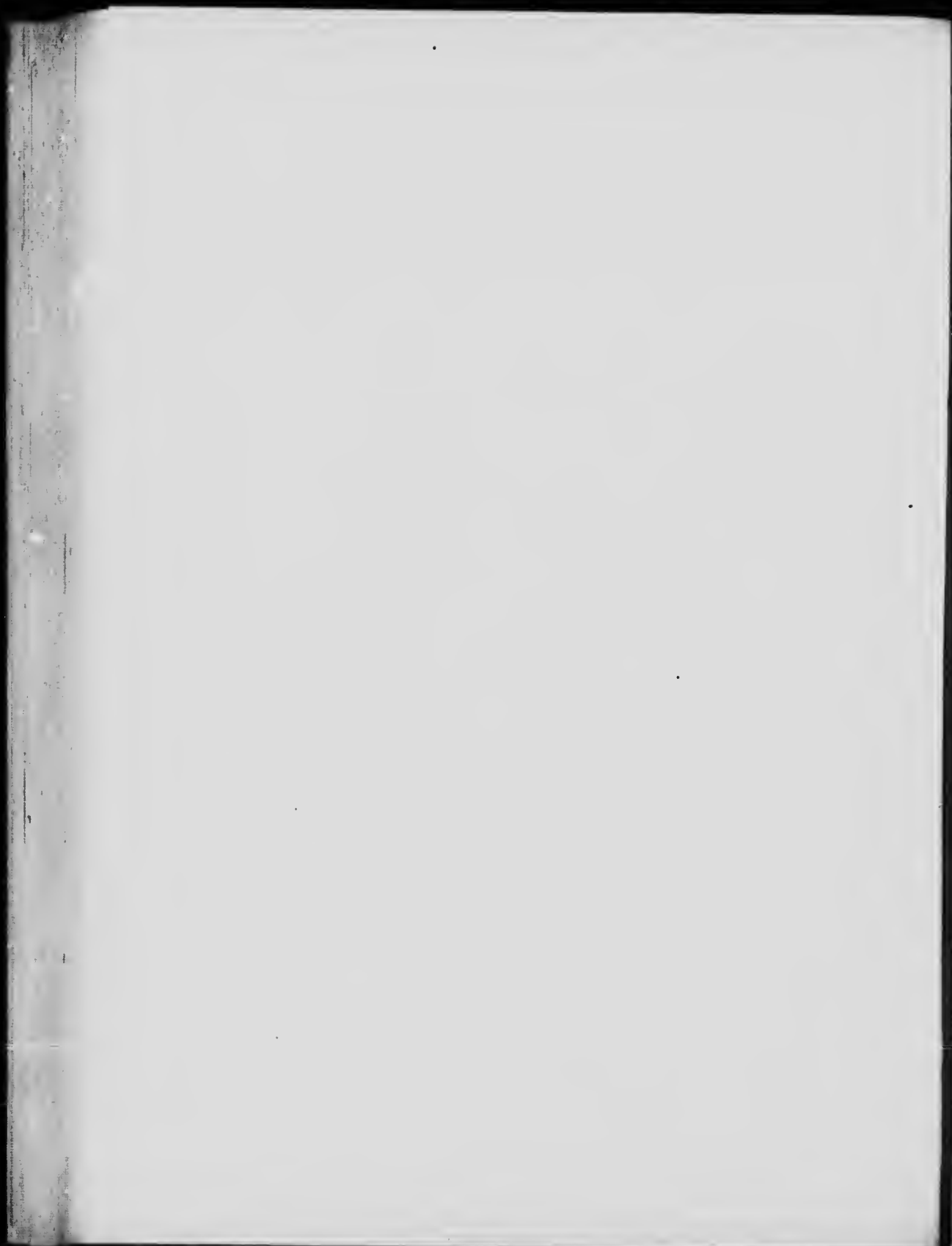
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rest of his life explaining; and the others would only whistle, and call him *Jagoo*, the lying woodpecker. On the whole, it would be better for a bird with such a very unusual experience to keep still about it.

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# KWASEEKHO





## KWASEEKHO



SHELDRAKE, or shelbird, is the name by which this duck is generally known. Probably it was given him by gunners, who see him only in winter, when hunger drives him to eat mussels. The name fish-buck, which one hears occasionally, is much more appropriate. The long slender bill, with its serrated edges fitting into each other, like the teeth of a bear trap, just calculated to seize and hold a wriggling fish, is quite enough evidence as to the nature of the bird's food, even if one had not seen him fishing on the lakes and rivers which are his summer home.

That same bill, by the way, is sometimes a source of danger. Once, on the coast, I saw

*Kwaseekho*

a sheldrake trying in vain to fly against the wind, which flung him rudely among some tall reeds near me. The next moment Don, my old dog, had him. In a hungry moment he had driven his bill through both shells of a scallop, which slipped or worked its way up to his nostrils, muzzling the bird perfectly with a hard shell ring. The poor fellow by desperate trying could open his mouth barely wide enough to drink or to swallow the tiniest morsel. He must have been in this condition a long time, for the bill was half worn through, and he was so light that the wind blew him about like a great feather when he attempted to fly.

Fortunately Don was a good retriever and had brought the duck in with scarcely a quill ruffled; so I had the satisfaction of breaking his bands and letting him go free with a splendid rush. But the wind was too much for him; he dropped back into the water and went skittering down the harbor, like a lady with too much skirt and too big a hat in boisterous weather. Meanwhile Don lay on the sand, head up, ears up, whining eagerly

for the word to fetch. Then he dropped his head, and drew a long breath, and tried to puzzle it out why a man should go out on a freezing day in February, and tramp, and row, and get wet to find a bird, only to let him go after he had been fairly caught.

Kwaseekho the sheldrake leads a double life. In winter he is found along the Massachusetts coast and southward, where he leads a dog's life of it, notwithstanding his gay appearance. A hun-

dred guns are roaring at him wherever he goes. From daylight

to dark he has never a minute to eat his bit of fish, or to take a wink of sleep in peace. He flies to the ocean, and beds with his fellows on the broad open shoals for safety. But the east winds blow; and the shoals are a yeasty mass of tumbling breakers. They buffet him about; they twist his gay feathers; they dampen his pinions, spite of his

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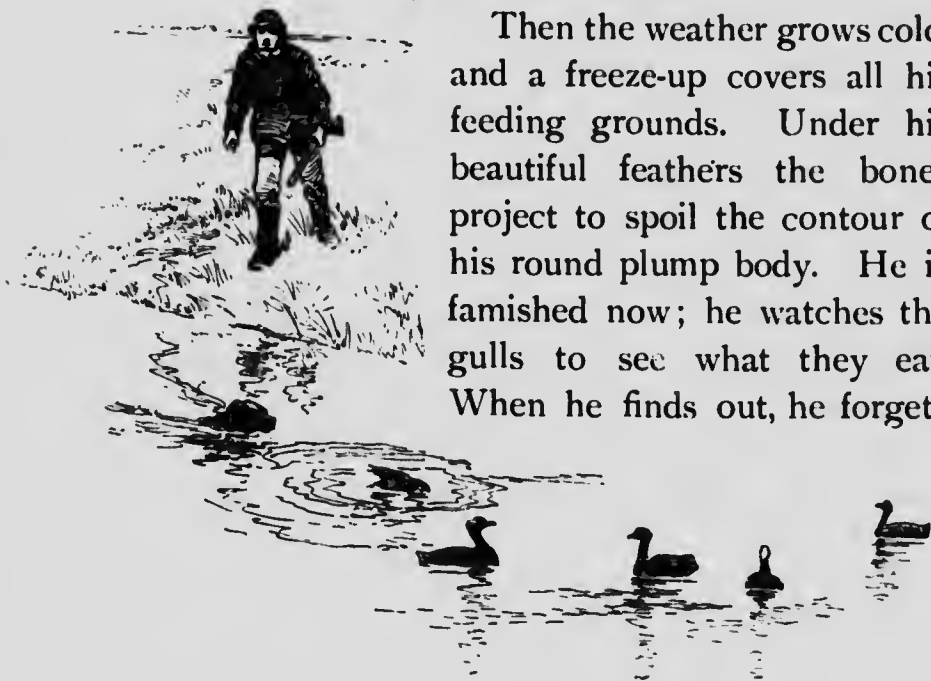
skill in swimming. Then he goes to the creeks and harbors.

*Kwaseekho*



Along the shore a flock of his own kind, apparently, are feeding in quiet water. Straight in he comes with unsuspecting soul, the morning light shining full on his white breast and bright red feet as he steadies himself to take the water. But *bang, bang!* go the guns; and *splash, splash!* fall his companions; and out of a heap of seaweed come

a man and a dog; and away he goes, sadly puzzled at the painted decoys in the water, to think it all over in hunger and sorrow.



Then the weather grows cold, and a freeze-up covers all his feeding grounds. Under his beautiful feathers the bones project to spoil the contour of his round plump body. He is famished now; he watches the gulls to see what they eat. When he finds out, he forgets

his caution, and roams about after stray mussels on the beach. In the spring hunger drives him into the ponds, where food is plenty, but where guns roar also, and boys lurk in every bush. Altogether it is small wonder that, as soon as his instinct tells him the streams of the North are open and the trout running up, he is off to a land of happier memories.

In summer he forgets his hardships. His life is peaceful as a meadow brook. His home is the wilderness — on a lonely lake, it may be, shimmering under the summer sun, or kissed into a thousand smiling ripples by the south wind; or perhaps it is a forest river, winding on by wooded hills and grassy points and lonely cedar swamps. In secret shallow bays the young broods are plashing about, learning to swim and dive and hide in safety. The plunge of the fish-hawk comes up from the pools. A noisy kingfisher rattles about from tree to stump, like a restless busybody. The hum of insects fills the air with a drowsy murmur. Now a deer steps daintily down the point, and looks, and

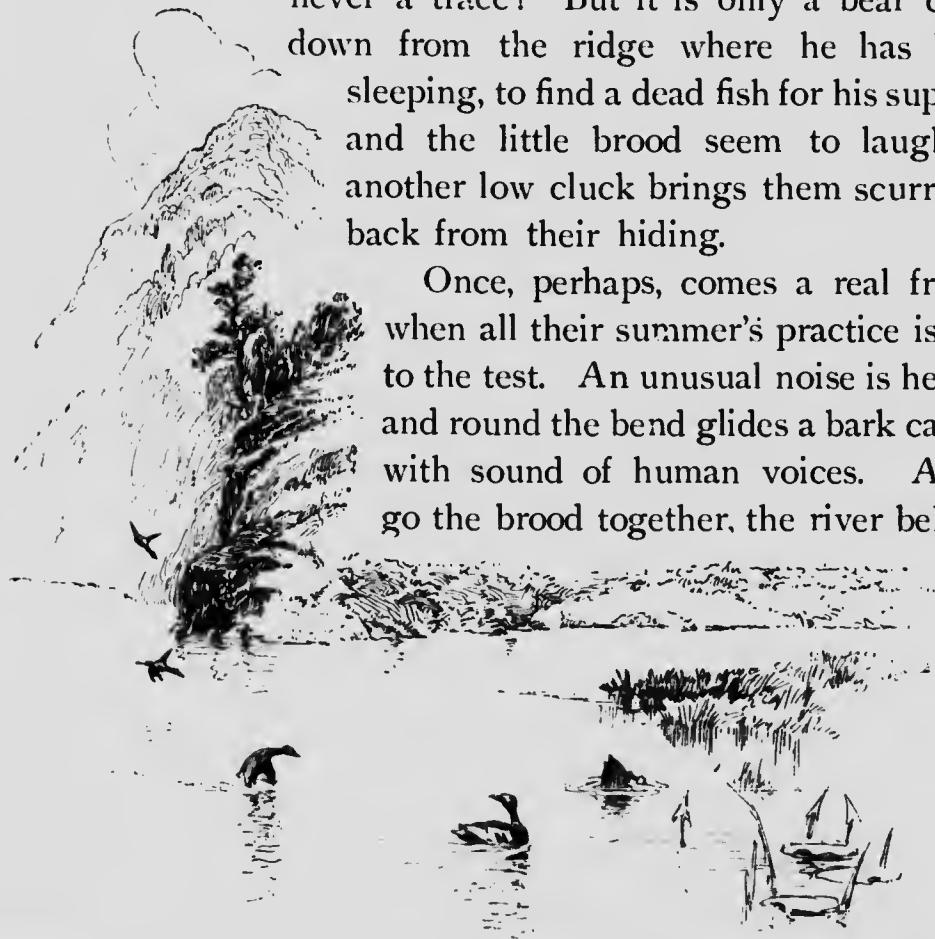




*Kwaseekho*

listens, and drinks. A great moose wades awkwardly out to plunge his head under and pull away at the lily roots. But the young brood mind not these harmless things. Sometimes, indeed, as the afternoon wears away, they turn their little heads apprehensively as the alders crash and sway on the bank above; a low cluck from the mother bird sends them all off into the grass to hide. How quickly they have disappeared, leaving never a trace! But it is only a bear come down from the ridge where he has been sleeping, to find a dead fish for his supper; and the little brood seem to laugh as another low cluck brings them scurrying back from their hiding.

Once, perhaps, comes a real fright, when all their summer's practice is put to the test. An unusual noise is heard; and round the bend glides a bark canoe, with sound of human voices. Away go the brood together, the river behind



them foaming like the wake of a tiny steamer as the swift-moving feet lift them almost out of water. Visions of ocean, the guns, falling birds and the hard winter distract the poor mother. She flutters wildly about the brood, now leading, now bravely facing the monster; now pushing along some weak little loiterer, now floundering near the canoe, as if wounded, to attract attention from the young. But they double the point at last, and hide away under the alders. The canoe glides by and makes no effort to find them. Silence is again over the forest. The little brood come back to the shallows, with mother bird fluttering round them to count again and again, lest any be missing. The kingfisher comes out of his hole in the bank. The river flows on as before, and peace returns; and over all is the mystic charm of the wilderness and the quiet of a summer day.

This is the way it all looks and seems to me, sitting over under the big hemlock, out of sight, and watching the birds through my field glass.



*Kwaseel! ho*

Day after day I have attended such little schools, unseen and unsuspected by the mother bird. Sometimes it was the a-b-c class, wee little downy fellows, learning to hide on a lily pad, and never getting a reward of merit in the shape of a young trout till they hid so well that the teacher (somewhat over-critical, I thought) was satisfied. Sometimes it was the baccalaureates that displayed their talents to the unbidden visitor, flashing out of sight, cutting through the water like a ray of light, striking a young trout on the bottom with the rapidity and certainty almost of the teacher. It was marvelous, the diving and swimming; and mother bird looked on and quacked her approval of the young graduates.

While all this careful training is going on at home, the drake is off on the lakes somewhere with his boon companions, having a good time, and utterly neglectful of parental responsibility. Sometimes I have found clubs of five or six, gay fellows all, living by themselves at one end of a big lake where the fishing was good. All summer long they

roam and gad about, free from care, and happy as summer campers, leaving the mother birds, meanwhile, to feed and educate their offspring. Once only have I seen a drake sharing in the responsibilities of his family. I watched three days to find the cause of his devotion; but he disappeared the third evening, and I never saw him again. Whether the drakes are lazy and run away, or whether they have the atrocious habit of many male birds and animals of destroying their young, and so are driven away by the females, I have not been able to find out.

These birds are very destructive on the trout streams. If a summer camper spare them, it is because of his interest in the young, and especially because of the mother bird's devotion. When the recreant drake is met with, however, he goes promptly upon the bill of fare with other good things.

Occasionally one overtakes a brood on a rapid river. Then the poor birds are distressed indeed. At the first glimpse of the canoe they are off, churning the water into foam in their flight. Not till they are out of



*Kwaseekho*

sight, round the bend, do they hear the cluck that tells them hide. Some are slow in finding a hiding place on the strange waters. The mother bird hurries them. They are hunting in frantic haste when round the bend comes the swift-gliding canoe. With a note of alarm they are all off again, for she will not leave even the weakest alone. Again they double the bend and try to hide; again the canoe overtakes them; and so on, mile after mile, till a stream or bogan flowing into the river offers a road to escape. Then, like a flash, the little ones run in under shelter of the overhanging banks, and glide up stream noiselessly, while mother bird flutters on down the river just ahead of the canoe. Having lured it away to a safe distance, as she thinks, she takes wing and returns to the young.

Their powers of endurance are remarkable. Once, on the Restigouche, we started a brood of little ones late in the afternoon. We were moving along in a good current, looking for a camping ground, and had little thought for the birds, which could never get far enough

ahead to hide securely. For five miles they kept ahead of us, rushing out at each successive stretch of water, and fairly distancing us in a straight run. When we camped they were still below us. At dusk I was sitting motionless near the river when a slight movement over near the opposite bank attracted me. There was the mother bird, stealing along up stream under the fringe of bushes. The young followed in single file. There was no splashing of water now; no evidence of fright or hurry. Shadows were not more noiseless.

Twice since then I have seen them do the same thing. I have no doubt they returned that evening all the way up to the feeding grounds where we first started them; for, like the kingfishers, every bird seems to have his own piece of the stream. He never fishes in his neighbor's pools, nor will he suffer any poaching in his own. On the Restigouche we found a brood every few miles; on other rivers, less plentifully stocked with trout, they are less numerous. On lakes there is often a brood at either end; but though I have



*Kwaseekho*

watched them carefully, I have never seen them cross to each other's fishing grounds.

Once, up on the Big Toledi, I saw a curious bit of their education. I was paddling across the lake when I saw a shelbird lead her brood into a little bay, where I knew the water was shallow; and immediately they began dipping, though very awkwardly. They were evidently taking their first lessons in diving. The next afternoon I was near the same place. I had done fishing and had pushed the canoe into some tall grass out of sight, and was sitting there just doing nothing.

A musquash came by, and rubbed his nose against the canoe, and nibbled a lily root before he noticed me. A shoal of minnows were playing among the grasses near by. A dragon-fly stood on his head against a reed—a most difficult feat, I should think. He was trying some contortion that I could not make out, when a deer stepped down the bank to drink and never saw me. Doing nothing pays one under such circumstances, if only by the glimpses it gives of animal



The little fellows occasionally brought up something to eat



2

life. It is so rare to see a wild thing unconscious.

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Then Kwaseekho came into the shallow bay again with her brood, and immediately they began dipping as before. I wondered how the mother made them dive, till I looked through the field-glass and saw that the little fellows occasionally brought up something to eat. But there certainly were no fish to be caught in that warm, shallow water. An idea struck me, and I pushed the canoe out of the grass, sending the brood across the lake in wild confusion. There on the black bottom were a dozen young trout, all freshly caught, and all with the air-bladder punctured by the mother bird's sharp bill. She had provided their dinner, but she brought it to a good place and made them dive to get it.



As I paddled back to camp, I thought of the way the Indians taught their boys to shoot. They hung their dinner from the trees, out of reach, and made them cut the cord that held it, with an arrow. Did the Indians originate this, I wonder, in their

*Kwaseekho*

direct way of looking at things, almost as simple as the birds'? Or was the idea whispered to some Indian hunter, long ago, as he watched Kwaseekho teach her young to dive?

Of all the broods I have met in the wilderness, only one, I think, ever grew to recognize me and my canoe a bit, so as to fear me less than another. It was on a little lake in the heart of the woods, where we lingered long on our journey, influenced partly by the beauty of the place, and partly by the fact that two or three bears roamed about there, which I sometimes met at twilight on the lake shore. The brood were as wild as other broods; but I met them often, and they sometimes found the canoe lying motionless and harmless near them, without quite knowing how it came there. So after a few days they looked at me with curiosity and uneasiness only, unless I came too near.

There were six in the brood. Five were hardy little fellows that made the water boil behind them as they scurried across the lake.

But the sixth was a weakling. He had been hurt, — by a hawk perhaps, or a big trout, or a mink; or he had swallowed a bone; or maybe he was just a weak little fellow with no accounting for it. Whenever the brood were startled, he struggled bravely a little while to keep up; then he always fell behind. The mother would come back, and urge and help him; but it was of little use. He was not strong enough; and the last glimpse I always had of them was a foamy wake disappearing round a distant point, while far astern was a ripple, where the little fellow still paddled away, doing his best pathetically.

One afternoon the canoe glided round a point and ran almost up to the brood before they saw it, giving them a terrible fright. Away they went on the instant, *putter, putter, putter*, lifting themselves almost out of water with the swift-moving feet and tiny wings. The mother bird took wing, returned and crossed the bow of the canoe, back and forth, with loud quackings. The weakling was behind as usual; and in a sudden spirit of



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curiosity, or perversity, I shot the canoe forward, almost up to him. He tried to dive; got tangled in a lily stem in his fright; came up, flashed under again; and I saw him rise to the surface, ten feet away, in some grass, where he sat motionless and almost invisible amid the pads and yellow stems. I remained where I was to watch him and see what the mother would do.

How frightened he was! Yet how still he sat! Whenever I took my eyes from him a moment I had to hunt again, sometimes two or three minutes, before I could see him there.

Meanwhile the brood went almost to the opposite shore before they stopped; the mother, satisfied at last by my quietness, flew over and lit among them. She had not seen the little one. Through the glass I saw her flutter round and round them, to be quite sure they were all there. Then she missed him. I could see it all in her movements. She must have clucked, I think, for the young suddenly disappeared, and she came swimming rapidly back over the way they had

come, looking, looking everywhere. Round the canoe she went at a safe distance, searching among the grass and lily pads, calling him softly to come out. But he was very near the canoe, and very much frightened; the only effect of her calls was to make him crouch closer against the grass stems, while the bright little eyes, grown large with fear, were fastened on me.

Slowly I backed the canoe away till it was out of sight, behind the point; though I could still see the mother bird through the bushes. She swam rapidly about where the canoe had been, calling more loudly; but the little fellow had lost confidence in her, or was too frightened, and refused to show himself. At last she discovered him and, with quacks and flutters that looked to me a bit hysteric, pulled him out of his hiding place. How she fussed over him! How she hurried and helped and praised and scolded him all the way over; and fluttered on ahead, and clucked the brood out of their hiding places to meet him! Then, with all her young about her, she

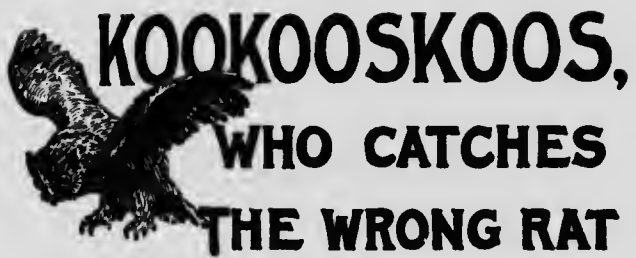


swept round the point into the quiet bay that was their training school.



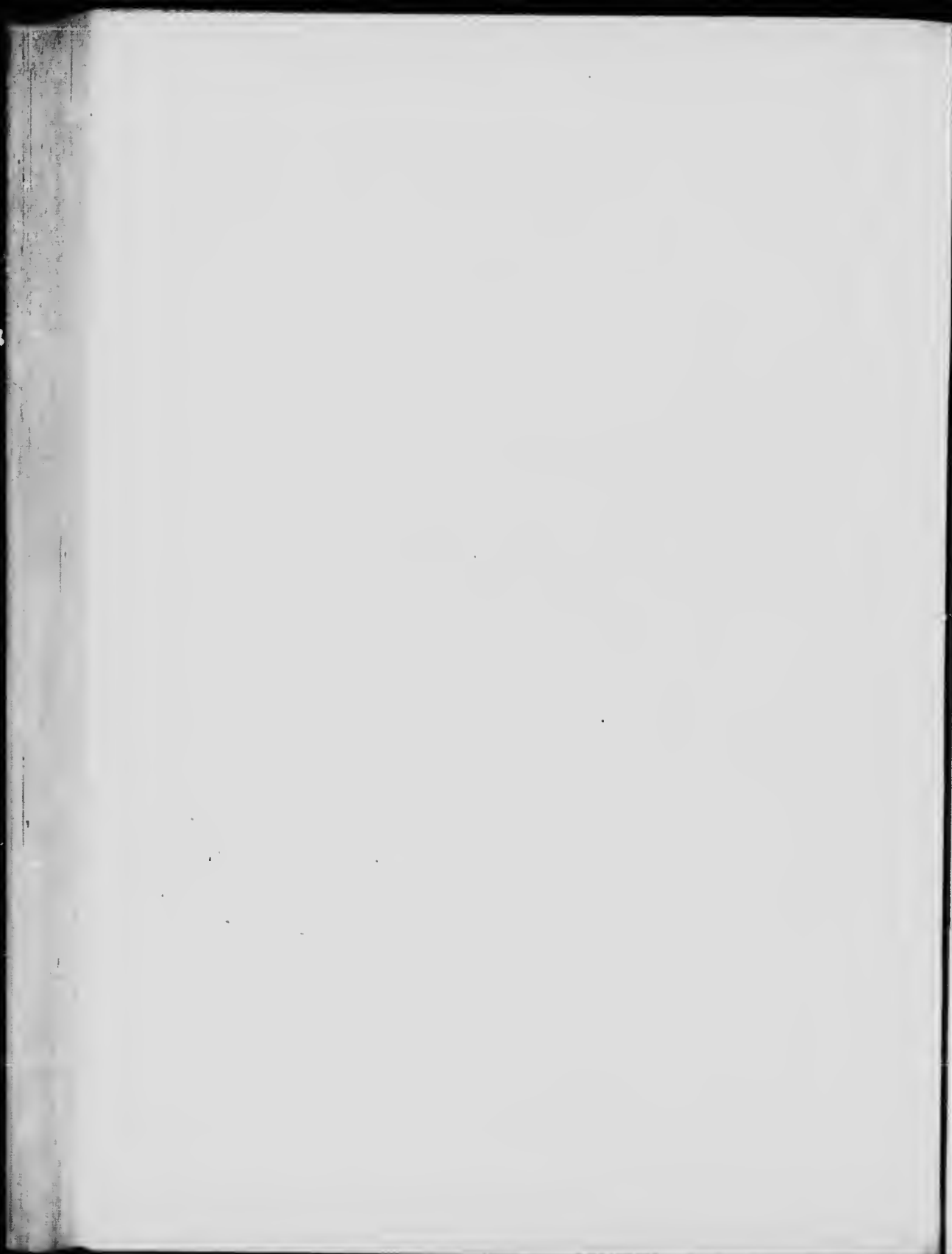
And I, drifting slowly up the lake into the sunset over the glassy water, was thinking how human it all was. "Doth he not leave the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?"





**KOOKOOSKOOS,  
WHO CATCHES  
THE WRONG RAT**





KOOKOOSKOOS, WHO CATCHES  
THE WRONG RAT



KOOKOOSKOOS is the big brown owl, the *Bubo Virginianus*, or Great Horned Owl of the books. But his Indian name is best. Almost any night in autumn, if you leave the town and go out towards the big woods, you can hear him calling it, *Koo-koo-skoos, koooo, kooo!* down in the swamp.

Kookooskoos is always catching the wrong rat. The reason is that he is a great hunter, and thinks that

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every furry thing which moves must be game; and so he is like the fool sportsman who shoots at a sound, or a motion in the bushes, before finding out what makes it. Sometimes the rat turns out to be a skunk, or a weasel; sometimes your pet cat; and, once in a lifetime, it is your own fur cap, or even your head; and then you feel the weight and the edge of Kookooskoos' claws. But he never learns wisdom by mistakes; for, spite of his grave appearance, he is excitable as a Frenchman; and so, whenever anything stirs in the bushes and a bit of fur appears, he cries out to himself, *A rat, Kookoo! a rabbit!* and swoops on the instant.

One evening, at twilight, as I came home from hunting in the big woods, I heard the sound of deer feeding just ahead. I stole forward to the edge of a thicket and stood there motionless, looking and listening intently. My cap was in my pocket, and only my head appeared above the low firs that sheltered me. Suddenly, without noise or warning of any kind, I received a sharp blow on the

head from behind, as if some one had struck me with a thorny stick. I turned quickly, surprised and a good bit startled; for I thought myself utterly alone in the woods — and I was. There was nobody there. Not a sound, not a motion broke the twilight stillness. Something trickled on my neck; I put up my hand, to find my hair already wet with blood. More startled than ever, I sprang through the thicket, looking, listening everywhere for sight or sound of my enemy. Still no creature bigger than a wood mouse; no movement save that of nodding fir tips; no sound but the thumping of my own heart and, far behind me, a sudden rush and a bump or two as the frightened deer broke away; then perfect stillness again, as if nothing had ever lived in the thickets.

I was little more than a boy; and I went home more puzzled and more frightened than I have ever been, before or since, in the woods. I ran into the doctor's office on my way. He looked at me queerly when I told my story. Of course he did not believe me, and I made no effort to persuade him.

*Kookooskoos*

*Kookooskoos*

Indeed, I scarcely believed myself. But for the blood which stained my handkerchief, and the pain in my head, I should have doubted the reality of the whole experience.

That night I started up out of sleep, and said before I was half awake: "It was an *owl* that hit you on the head—of course it was an owl!" Then I remembered that, years before, an older boy had a horned owl, which he had taken from a nest, and which he kept loose in a dark garret over the shed. None of us younger boys dared go up to the garret, for the owl was always hungry, and the moment a boy's head appeared through the scuttle the owl said *Hoooo!* and swooped for it. So we used to get acquainted with the big pet by pushing in a dead rat or a chicken, on the end of a stick, and climbing in ourselves afterwards.

As I write, the whole picture comes back to me again vividly; the dark, cobwebby old garret, pierced here and there by a pencil of light, in which the motes were dancing; the fierce bird down on the floor in the darkest corner, horns up, eyes gleaming, feathers all

a bristle till he looked big as a bushel basket in the dim light, standing on his game with one foot and tearing it savagely to pieces with the other, snapping his beak and gobbling up feathers, bones and all, in great hungry mouthfuls; and, over the scuttle, two or three small boys staring in eager curiosity, but clinging to each other's coats fearfully, ready to tumble down the ladder with a yell at the first hostile demonstration.

The next afternoon I was back in the big woods to investigate. Fifty feet behind the thicket where I had been struck was a dead stub overlooking a little clearing. "That's his watchtower," I thought. "While I was watching the deer, he was up there watching my head; and when it moved he swooped."

I had no intention of giving him another flight at the same game, but hid my fur cap among some bushes, tied a long string to it, went back into the thicket with the other end of the string, and sat down to wait. A low *Whooo-hoo-hoo!* came from across the valley to tell me I was not the only watcher in the woods.

*Kookooskoos*

*Kookooskoos*

Towards dusk I noticed suddenly that the top of the old stub looked a bit peculiar, but it was some time before I made out a big owl sitting up there. His back was towards me; he sat up very straight and still, so as to make himself just a piece, the tip end, of the stub. As I watched, he hooted once and bent forward to listen. Then I pulled on my string.

With the first rustle of a leaf he whirled and poised forward, in the intense attitude an eagle takes when he sights the prey. On the instant he had sighted the cap, wriggling in and out among the low bushes, and swooped for it like an arrow. Just as he dropped his legs to strike, I gave a sharp pull, and the cap jumped from under him. He missed his strike, but wheeled like a fury and struck again. Another jerk, and again he missed. Then he was at the thicket where I stood; his fierce yellow eyes glared straight into mine for a startled instant, and he brushed me with his wings as he sailed away into the shadow of the spruces.

Small doubt now that I had seen my assailant of the night before; for an owl has regular hunting grounds, and uses the same watchtowers night after night. He had seen my head in the thicket, and struck at the first movement. Perceiving his mistake, he kept straight on over my head; so of course there was nothing in sight when I turned. As an owl's flight is perfectly noiseless, I had heard nothing, though he passed close enough to strike, and I was listening intently. And so another mystery of the woods was made plain by a little watching.

Years afterwards, the knowledge gained stood me in good stead in clearing up another mystery. It was in a lumber camp — always a superstitious place — in the heart of a Canada forest. I had followed a wandering herd of caribou too far, one day, and late in the afternoon found myself alone at a river, some twenty miles from camp. Somewhere above me I knew that a crew of lumbermen were at work; so I headed up river to find their camp, if possible, and avoid sleeping out in the snow and bitter cold. It

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was long after dark, and the moon was flooding forest and river with a wonderful light, when I at last caught sight of the shanty. The click of my snowshoes brought a dozen big men to the door. At that moment I felt rather than saw that they seemed troubled and alarmed at seeing me alone; but I was too tired to notice, and no words save those of welcome were spoken until I had eaten heartily. Then, as I started out for another look at the wild beauty of the place under the moonlight, a lumberman followed and touched me on the shoulder.

"Best not go far from camp alone, sir. 'Tis n't above safe hereabouts," he said in a low voice. I noticed that he glanced back over his shoulder as he spoke.

"But why?" I objected. "There's nothing in these woods to be afraid of."

"Come back to camp and I'll tell you. It's warmer there," he said. And I followed to hear a strange story,—how "Andy there" was sitting on a stump, smoking his pipe in the twilight, when he was struck and cut on the head from behind; and when he sprang

up to look, there was nothing there, nor any track save his own in the snow. The next night Gillie's fur cap had been snatched from his head, and when *he* turned there was nobody in sight; and when he burst into camp, with all his wits frightened out of him, he could scarcely speak, and his face was deathly white. Other uncanny things had happened since, in the same way, and coupled with a bad accident on the river, which the men thought was an omen, they had put the camp into such a state of superstitious fear that no one ventured alone out of doors after nightfall.

I thought of Kookooskoos and my own head, but said nothing. They would only have resented the suggestion.

Next day I found my caribou, and returned to the lumber camp before sunset. At twilight there was Kookooskoos, an enormous fellow, looking like the end of a big spruce stub, keeping sharp watch over the clearing, and fortunately behind the camp, where he could not see the door. I called the men and set them crouching in the snow under the low

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*Kookooskoos*

eaves. — “Stay there a minute and I'll show you the ghost.” That was all I told them.

Taking the skin of a hare, which I had shot that day, I hoisted it cautiously on a stick, the lumbermen watching curiously. A slight scratch of the stick, a movement of the fur along the splits, then a great dark shadow shot over our heads. It struck the stick sharply and swept into the spruces across the clearing, taking Bunny's skin with it.



Then one big lumberman, who saw the point, jumped up with a yell and danced a jig in the snow, like a schoolboy. There was no need of further demonstration with a cap; and nobody volunteered his head for a final experiment; but all remembered seeing the owl on his nightly watch, and knew something of his swooping habits. Of course some were incredulous at first, and had a dozen questions and objections when we were in camp. So I spent half the night in convincing them that they *had* been brought up in the woods to be scared by an owl.

Poor Kookooskoos! they shot him next night on his watchtower, and nailed him to the camp door as a warning.

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Should you ever find Kookoo koos on his watchtower, and observe him awhile patiently in the twilight, you will see a curious bit of woodcraft, and perhaps discover the object of his uncanny hooting. Sometimes if he is a young owl, he hoots for practice, or to learn how; and then he makes an awful use of it,—a rasping screech, before his voice deepens. And if you are camping in places new to the woods, the chances are that you lie awake and shiver for the sound of no other sound like it in the night woods. Sometimes when you climb to his nest, he has a terrifying *hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo*, running up and down a deep guttural scale, like a fiendish laugh, accompanied by a vicious snapping of the beak. If you are a small boy, and it is getting dark in the woods, you will find down the tree quick and let us hear him make the regular *whooo-hoo-hoo, whoo-hoo-hoo*—five notes, with the second and third served up as a hunting

**Kookooskoos**



call, which he uses to alarm the game. That is queer hunting; but his ears account for it.

*Kookooskoos*



If you separate the feathers on Kookooskoos' head, you find an enormous ear-opening running from above his eye halfway round his face. And the ear within is so marvelously sensitive that it can hear the rustle of a rat in the grass, or the scrape of a sparrow's toes on a branch fifty feet away. So he sits on his watchtower, so still that he is never noticed, and as twilight comes on, when he can see best, he hoots suddenly and listens. The sound has a muffled quality which makes it hard to locate, and it frightens every bird and small animal within hearing; for all know Kookooskoos, and how fierce he is. As the terrifying sound rolls out of the air so near them, fur and feathers shiver with fright. A rabbit stirs in his form; a partridge shakes on his branch; the mink stops hunting frogs at the brook; the skunk takes his nose out of the hole where he is eating sarsaparilla roots. A leaf stirs, a toe scrapes, and instantly Kookooskoos is there.

His fierce eyes glare in; his great claws drop; one grip, and it's all over. For the very sight of him scares the little creatures so that there is no life left in them to cry out or to run away.

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A nest which I found, a few years ago, shows how well this kind of hunting succeeds. It was in a gloomy evergreen swamp, in a big tree, some eighty feet from the ground. I found it by some pellets of hair and feathers at the foot of the tree; for the owl devours every part of his game, and after digestion is complete, feathers, bones and hair are disgorged in small balls, like so many sparrow heads. When I looked up, there at the top was a huge mass of sticks, which had been added to year after year till it was nearly three feet across, and half as thick. Kookooskoos was not there. He had heard me coming and slipped away silently.

Wishing to be sure the nest was occupied before trying the hard climb, I went away and hid in a thicket. Presently a large owl came back and stood by the nest. Soon after

a smaller bird, the male, glided up beside her. Then I came on cautiously, watching to see what they would do.

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At the first crack of a twig both birds started forward; the male slipped away; the female dropped below the nest, and stood behind a limb, just her face peering through a crotch in my direction. Had I not known she was there, I might have looked the tree over twenty times without finding her. And there she stayed hidden till I was halfway up the tree.

When I peered at last over the edge of the nest, after a desperately hard climb, there was a bundle of dark gray down in a little hollow in the middle. It touched me at the time that the little ones rested on a feather bed pulled from the mother bird's own breast. I brushed the down with my fingers. Instantly two heads came up, fuzzy gray heads, with black pointed beaks, and beautiful hazel eyes, and a funny long pin-feather over each ear, which made them look like little wise clerks just waked up. When I touched them again they staggered up and opened

their mouths, — enormous mouths for such little fellows; then, seeing that I was an intruder, they tried to bristle their few pinfeathers and snap their beaks.

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They were fat as two aldermen; and no wonder. Placed around the edge of the big nest were a red squirrel, a rat, a chicken, a few frogs' legs, and a rabbit. Fine fare that, at eighty feet from the ground. Kookooskoos had had good hunting. All the game was partly eaten, showing that I had disturbed their dinner; and only the hinder parts were left, showing that owls like the head and brains best. I left them undisturbed and came away; for I wanted to watch the young grow — which they did marvelously, and were presently learning to hoot. But I have been less merciful to the great owls ever since, thinking of the enormous destruction of game represented in raising two or three such young savages, year after year, in the same swamp.

Once, at twilight, I shot a big owl that was sitting on a limb facing me, with what appeared to be a long tail hanging below the



*Kookooskoos*

limb. The tail turned out to be a large mink, just killed, with a beautiful skin that put five dollars into a boy's locker. Another time I shot one that sailed over me; when he came down, there was a ruffed grouse, still living, in his claws. Another time I could not touch one that I had killed for the overpowering odor which was in his feathers, showing that *Mephitis*, the skunk, never loses his head when attacked. But Kookooskoos, like the fox, cares little for such weapons, and in the spring, when game is scarce, swoops for and kills a skunk wherever he finds him prowling away from his den in the twilight.

The most savage bit of his hunting that I ever saw was one dark winter afternoon, on the edge of some thick woods. I was watching a cat, a half-wild creature, that was watching a red squirrel making a great fuss over some nuts which he had hidden, and which he claimed somebody had stolen. Somewhere behind us, Kookooskoos was watching from a pine tree. The squirrel was chattering in the midst of a whirlwind of leaves and empty shells which he had

thrown out on the snow; behind him the cat, creeping nearer and nearer, had crouched with blazing eyes and quivering muscles, her whole attention fixed on the spring, when broad wings shot silently over my hiding place and fell like a shadow on the cat. One set of strong claws gripped her behind the ears; the others were fastened like a vise in the spine. Generally one such grip is enough, but the cat was strong, and at the first touch sprang away. In a moment the owl was after her, floating, hovering above, till the right moment came, when he dropped and struck again. Then the cat whirled and fought like a fury. For a few moments there was a desperate battle, fur and feathers flying, the cat screeching like mad, the owl silent as death. Then the great claws did their work. When I straightened up from my thicket, Kookooskoos was standing on his game, tearing off the flesh with his feet, and carrying

**Kookooskoos**

*Kookooskoos*

it up to his mouth with the same movement, swallowing everything alike, as if famished.

Over them the squirrel, which had whisked up a tree at the first alarm, was peeking with evil eyes over the edge of a limb, snickering at the blood-stained snow and the dead cat, scolding, barking, threatening the owl for having disturbed the search for his stolen walnuts.

I caught that same owl soon after in a peculiar way. A farmer near by told me that an owl was taking his chickens regularly. Undoubtedly the bird had been driven southward by the severe winter, and had not taken up regular hunting grounds until he caught the cat. Then came the chickens. I set up a pole, on the top of which was nailed a bit of board for a platform. On the platform was fastened a small steel trap, and under it hung a dead chicken. The next morning there was Kookooskoos on the platform, one foot in the trap, at which he was pulling awkwardly. Owls, from their peculiar ways of hunting, are prone to light on stubs and exposed branches; and so

Kookooskoos had used my pole as a watchtower before carrying off his game.

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There is another way in which he is easily fooled. In the early spring, when he is mating, and again in the autumn, when the young birds are well fed and before they have learned much, you can bring him close up to you by imitating his hunting call. In the wilderness, where these birds are plenty, I have often had five or six about me at once. You have only to go well out beyond your tent, and sit down quietly, making yourself part of the place. Give the call a few times, and if there is a young bird near with a full stomach, he will answer and gradually come nearer. Soon he is in the tree over your head. Keep still now, and presently he sets up a great hooting that you have called him and do not answer. Others are attracted by his calling; they come in silently from all directions; the outcry is startling. The call is more nervous, more eerie, more terrifying close at hand than when heard in the distance. They sweep about like shadows, *hoo-hoo-hooing* and frolicking in their own

***Kookooskoos***



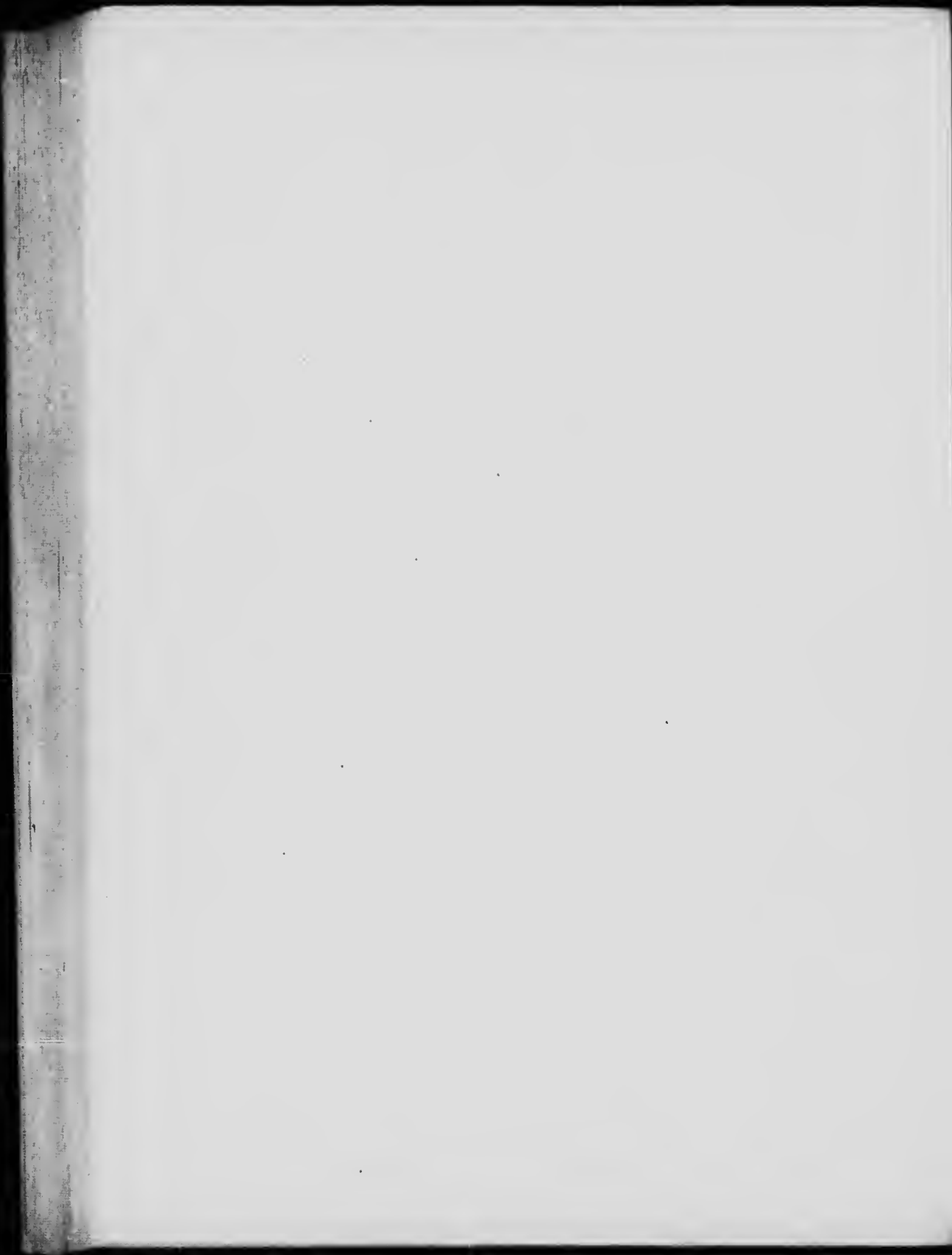
*Kookooskoos*

uncanny way; then go off to their separate watchtowers and their hunting. But the chances are that you will be awakened with a start more than once in the night, as some inquisitive young owl comes back and gives the hunting call in the hope of finding out what the first summons was all about.

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# CROW-WAYS







## CROW-WAYS

HE crow is very much of a rascal — that is, if any creature can be called a rascal for following out natural and rascally inclinations.

I came to this conclusion one early morning, several years ago, as I watched an old crow diligently exploring a fringe of bushes that grew along the wall of a deserted pasture. He had eaten a clutch of thrush's eggs, and carried off three young sparrows to feed his own young, before I found out what he was about. Since then I have surprised him often at the same depredations.

An old farmer has assured me that he has also caught him tormenting his sheep, lighting on their backs and pulling the wool out by the roots, to get fleece for lining his nest. This is a much more serious charge than





that of pulling up corn, though the latter makes almost every farmer his enemy.

Yet with all his rascality he has many curious and interesting ways. In fact, I hardly know another bird that so well repays a season's study; only one must be very patient, and put up with frequent disappointments, if he would learn much of a crow's peculiarities by personal observation. How shy he is! How cunning and quick to learn wisdom! Yet he is very easily fooled; and some experiences that ought to teach him wisdom he seems to forget within an hour. Almost every time I went shooting, in the old barbarian days before I learned better, I used to get one or two crows from a flock that ranged over my hunting ground, by hiding among the pines and calling like a young crow. If the flock was within hearing, it was astonishing to hear the loud chorus of *haw-haws*, and to see them come rushing over the same grove where, a week before, they had been fooled in the same way. Sometimes, indeed, they seemed to remember; for when the pseudo young crow

began his racket they would collect on a distant pine tree and *haw-haw* in doubtful answer. But curiosity always got the better of them, and they generally compromised by sending over some swift, long-winged old flier, only to see him go tumbling down at the report of a gun ; and away they would go, screaming at the top of their voices, and never stopping till they were miles away. Next week they would do exactly the same thing.

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*Crow-Ways*



Crows, more than any other birds, are fond of excitement and great crowds ; the slightest unusual object furnishes an occasion for an assembly. A wounded bird will create as much stir in a flock of crows as a railroad accident does in a village. But when some prowling old crow discovers an owl sleeping away the sunlight in the top of a great hemlock, his delight and excitement know no bounds. There is a suppressed frenzy in his very call that every crow in the neighborhood understands. *Come ! come ! everybody come !* he seems to be screaming as he circles over the tree-top ; and within two minutes there are more crows gathered



## Crow-Ways

about that old hemlock than one would believe existed within miles of the place. I counted over seventy, one day, immediately about a tree in which one of them had found an owl; and I think there must have been as many more flying about the outskirts that I could not count.

At such times one can approach very near, with a little care; for whenever an owl is discovered the crows forget to post their usual sentinels. Creeping through the underbrush you find yourself suddenly in the midst of a tremendous excitement. The crows nearest the owl sit about in the trees cawing all at once; not a crow is silent. Those on the outskirts are flying rapidly about and making, if possible, more noise than the inner ring. The owl meanwhile sits blinking and staring, out of sight in the green top. Every moment two or three crows leave the ring to fly up close and peep in at him, and then go screaming back again to their perches, where they hop about, cawing, nodding their heads, striking the branches, and acting for all the world like excited stump speakers.



The din grows louder and louder; fresh voices are coming in every minute; and the owl, wondering in some vague way if he is the cause of it all, flies off to some other tree, where he can be quiet and go to sleep. Then, with a great rush and clatter, the crows follow, some swift old scout keeping close to the owl and calling all the way to guide the whole cawing rabble. When the owl stops, they gather round again and go through the same performance more excitedly than before. So it continues till the owl finds a hollow tree and goes in out of sight, leaving them to caw themselves tired; or else he finds some dense pine grove, and doubles about here and there, with that shadowy noiseless flight of his, till he has thrown them off the track. Then he flies into the thickest tree he can find, generally outside the grove where the crows are looking, and sitting close up against the trunk blinks his great yellow eyes and listens to the racket that goes sweeping through the grove, peering curiously into every thick pine, searching everywhere for the lost excitement.





The crows give him up reluctantly. They circle for a few minutes over the grove, rising and falling with that beautiful, regular motion that seems like the practice drill of all gregarious birds, and generally end by collecting in some tree at a distance and *hawing* about it for hours, till some new excitement calls them elsewhere.

Just why they grow so excited over an owl is an open question. I have never seen them molest him, nor show any tendency other than to stare at him occasionally and make a great noise about it. That they recognize him as a thief and cannibal I have no doubt. But he thieves by night when other birds are abed, and as they practise their own thieving by open daylight, it may be that they are denouncing him as an impostor. Or it may be that the owl in his nightly prowlings sometimes snatches a young crow off the roost; and so they grow excited, as all birds do, in the presence of their natural enemy. They make much the same kind of a fuss over a hawk; though the latter easily escapes the annoyance by flying swiftly

away, or by circling slowly upward to a height so dizzy that the crows dare not follow.

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*Crow-Ways*



In the early spring I have utilized this habit of the crows in my search for owls' nests. The crows are much more apt to discover its whereabouts than the most careful ornithologist; and they gather about it frequently for a little excitement. Once I utilized the habit for getting a good look at the crows themselves. I carried out an old stuffed owl, and set it up on a pole, close against a great pine tree, on the edge of a grove. Then I lay down in a thick clump of bushes and *hawed* excitedly. The first messenger from the flock flew straight over, without making any discoveries. The second one found the owl, and I had no need for further calling. *Haw! haw!* he cried deep down in his throat — *here he is! here's the rascal!* In a moment he had the whole flock there; and for nearly ten minutes they kept coming in from every direction. A more frenzied lot I never saw. The *hawing* was tremendous, and I hoped to settle at last



the real cause and outcome of the excitement; but an old crow, flying close over my hiding place, caught sight of me looking out through the bushes. How he made himself heard or understood in the din I do not know; but the crow is never too excited to heed a danger note. The next moment the whole flock were streaming away across the woods, giving the scatter-cry at every flap.

There is another way in which the crows' love of variety is manifest, though in a much more dignified manner. Occasionally a flock may be surprised sitting about in the trees, deeply absorbed in watching a performance by one of their number. The crow's chief note is the hoarse *haw, haw*, with which everybody is familiar, and which seems capable of expressing everything, from the soft chatter of going to bed in the pine tops to the loud derision with which he detects all ordinary attempts to surprise him. Certain crows, however, have unusual vocal abilities, and at times they seem to use them for the entertainment of the others. Yet I suspect that these vocal gifts are seldom used, or

even discovered, until lack of amusement throws them upon their own resources. Certain it is that, whenever a crow makes any unusual sounds, there are always several more about, *hawing* vigorously, yet seeming to listen attentively. I have caught them at this a score of times.

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*Crow-Ways*



One September afternoon, while walking quietly through the woods, my attention was attracted by an unusual sound coming from an oak grove, a favorite haunt of gray squirrels. The crows were cawing in the same direction; but every few minutes would come a strange cracking sound -- *c-r-r-rack-a-rack-rack*, as if some one had a giant nut-cracker and were snapping it rapidly. I stole forward till I could see perhaps fifty crows perched about in the oaks, all very attentive to something going on below them, that I could not see.

Not till I had crawled up to the brush fence, on the very edge of the grove, and peeked through, did I see the performer. On the end of a long delicate branch, a few feet above the ground, a small crow was







clinging, swaying up and down like a bobolink on a cardinal flower, balancing himself gracefully by spreading his wings, and every few minutes giving the strange cracking sound, accompanied by a flirt of his wings and tail as the branch swayed upward. At every repetition the crows *hawed* in applause. I watched them fully ten minutes before they saw me and flew away.

Several times since, I have been attracted by unusual sounds, and have surprised a flock of crows which were evidently watching a performance by one of their number. Once it was a deep musical whistle, much like the *too-loo-loo* of the blue jay (who is the crow's cousin, for all his bright colors), but deeper and fuller, and without the trill that always marks the blue jay's whistle. Once, in some big woods in Maine, it was a hoarse bark, utterly unlike a bird call, which made me slip heavy shells into my gun and creep forward, expecting some strange beast that I had never before met.

The same love of variety and excitement leads the crow to investigate any unusual

sight or sound that catches his attention. Hide anywhere in the woods, and make any queer sound you will, — play a jew's-harp, or pull a devil's-fiddle, or just call softly, — and first comes a blue jay, all agog to find out all about it. Next a red squirrel steals down and barks just over your head, to make you start, if possible. Then, if your eyes are sharp, you will see a crow gliding from thicket to thicket, keeping out of sight himself, yet drawing nearer and nearer to investigate the unusual sound. And if he is suspicious or unsatisfied, he will hide and wait patiently for you to come out and show yourself.

Not only is he curious about you, and watches you as you go about the woods, but he watches his neighbors as well. When a fox is started you can often trace his course, far ahead of your dogs, by the crows circling over him and calling *Rascal! rascal!* whenever he shows himself. He watches the ducks and plover, the deer and bear; he knows where they are, and what they are doing; and he will go far out of his way to





warn them, as well as his own kind, at the approach of danger. When birds nest, or foxes den, or beasts fight in the woods, he is there to see it. When other things fail he will even play jokes, as upon one occasion when I saw a young crow hide in a hole in a pine tree, and for two hours keep a whole flock in a frenzy of excitement by his distressed cawing. He would venture out when they were at a distance, peek all about cautiously to see that no one saw him, then set up a heart-rending appeal, only to dodge back out of sight when the flock came rushing in with a clamor that was deafening.

Only one of two explanations can account for his action in this case; either he was a young crow who did not appreciate the gravity of crying *Wolf! wolf!* when there was no wolf, or else it was a plain game of hide-and-seek. When the crows at length found him they chased him out of sight, either to chastise him, or, as I am inclined now to think, each one sought to catch him for the privilege of being the next to hide.

That crows do play at hide-and-seek, and other games without a name, becomes more and more evident to one who follows and watches them. Here is a curious bit of play that I discovered one September afternoon when a vigorous cawing over in the woods induced me to leave the orchard, where I was picking apples, for the more exciting occupation of spying on my dark neighbors.

*Crow-Ways*

The clamor came from an old deserted pasture, bounded on three sides by pine woods, and on the fourth by half-wild fields that straggled away to the dusty road beyond. Once, long ago, there was a farm here; but even the cellars have disappeared, and the crows no longer fear the place.

It was an easy task to creep unobserved through the nearest pine grove, and gain a safe hiding place under some junipers, on the edge of the old pasture. The cawing meanwhile was intermittent; at times it broke out in a perfect babel, as if every crow were doing his best to outcaw all the others; again there was silence save for an occasional short note, — the *all's well* of the sentinel on guard.



When I reached the junipers, the crows — half a hundred of them — were ranged in the pine tops along one edge of the open. They were quiet enough, save for an occasional scramble for position, evidently waiting for something to happen. Down on my right, on the fourth or open side of the pasture, a solitary old crow was perched in the top of a tall hickory. I might have taken him for a sentry but for a bright object which he held in his beak. It was too far to make out what the object was; but whenever he turned his head it flashed in the sunlight, like a bit of glass.

As I watched him curiously he launched himself into the air and came speeding down the center of the field, making for the pines at the opposite end. Instantly every crow was on the wing; they shot out from both sides, many that I had not seen before, all cawing like mad. They rushed upon the old fellow from the hickory, and for a few moments it was impossible to make out anything except a whirling, diving rush of black wings. The din meanwhile was deafening.

Something bright dropped from the excited flock, and a single crow swooped after it; but I was too much interested in the rush to note what became of him. The clamor ceased abruptly. The crows, after a short practice in rising, falling and wheeling to command, settled in the pines on both sides of the field, where they had been before. And there in the hickory was another crow with the same bright, flashing thing in his beak.

There was a long wait this time, as if for a breathing spell. Then the solitary crow came skimming down the field again without warning. The flock surrounded him on

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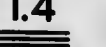
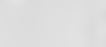
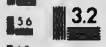
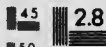
*Crow-Ways*





# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

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the instant, with the evident intention of hindering his flight as much as possible. They flapped their wings in his face; they zig-zagged in front of him; they attempted to light on his back. In vain he twisted and dodged and dropped like a stone. Wherever he turned he found fluttering wings to oppose his flight. The first object of the game was apparent: he was trying to reach the goal of pines opposite the hickory, and the others were trying to prevent it. Again and again the leader was lost to sight; but whenever the sunlight flashed from the bright thing he carried, he was certain to be found in the very midst of a clamoring crowd. Then the second object was clear: the crows were trying to confuse him and make him drop the talisman.

They circled rapidly down the field and back again, near the watcher. Suddenly the bright thing dropped, reaching the ground before it was discovered. Three or four crows swooped upon it, and a lively scrimmage began for its possession. In the midst of the struggle a small crow shot under the

contestants, and before they knew what was up he was scurrying away to the hickory with the coveted trinket held as high as he could carry it, as if in triumph at his sharp trick.

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*Crow-Ways*



The flock settled slowly into the pines again with much *hawing*. There was evidently a question whether the play ought to be allowed or not. Everybody had something to say about it; and there was no end of objection. At last it was settled good-naturedly, and they took places to watch till the new leader should give them opportunity for another chase.

There was no doubt left in the watcher's mind by this time as to what the crows were doing. They were playing a game, like so many schoolboys, enjoying to the full the long bright hours of the September afternoon. Did they find the bright object as they crossed the pasture on the way from Farmer B's corn-field, and the game so suggest itself? Or was the game first suggested, and the talisman brought afterwards? Every crow has a secret storehouse,



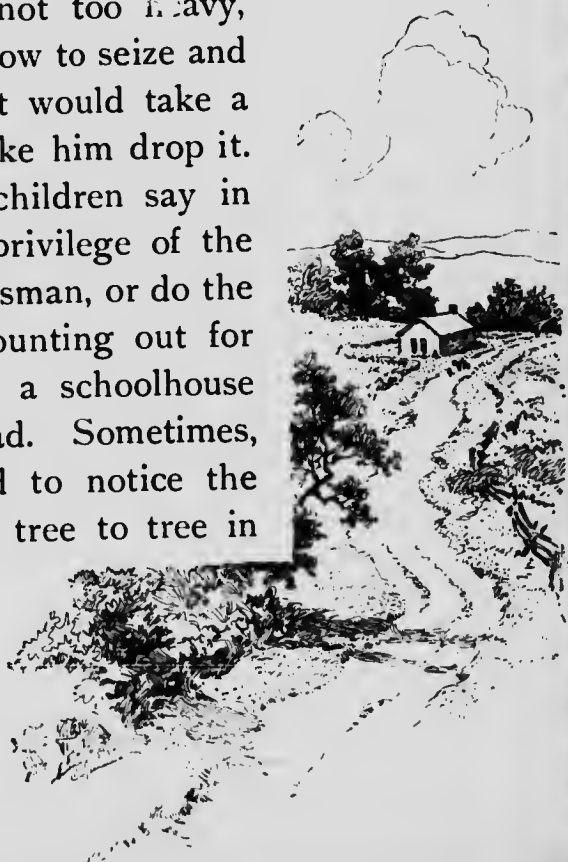
where he hides every bright thing he finds. Sometimes it is a crevice in the rocks under moss and ferns; sometimes the splintered end of a broken branch; sometimes a deserted owl's nest in a hollow tree; often a crotch in a big pine, covered carefully by brown needles; but wherever it is, it is full of bright things — glass, and china, and beads, and tin, and an old spoon, and a silvered buckle — and nobody but the crow himself knows how to find it. Did some crow fetch his best trinket for the occasion, or was this a special thing for games, and kept by the flock where any crow could get it?

These were some of the interesting things that were puzzling the watcher when he noticed that the hickory was empty. A flash over against the dark green revealed the leader. There he was, stealing along in the shadow, trying to reach the goal before they saw him. A derisive *haw!* announced his discovery. Then the fun began again, as noisy, as confusing, as enjoyable as ever.

When the bright object dropped this time, curiosity to get possession of it was stronger than my interest in the game. Besides, the apples were waiting. I jumped up, scattering the crows in wild confusion; but as they streamed away I fancied that there was still more of the excitement of play than of alarm in their flight and clamor.

The bright object which the leader carried proved to be the handle of a glass cup. A fragment of the vessel itself had broken off with the handle, so that the ring was complete. Altogether it was just the thing for the purpose—bright, and not too heavy, and most convenient for a crow to seize and carry. Once well gripped, it would take a good deal of worrying to make him drop it.

Who first was "it," as children say in games? Was it a special privilege of the crow who first found the talisman, or do the crows have some way of counting out for the first leader? There is a schoolhouse down that same old dusty road. Sometimes, when at play there, I used to notice the crows stealing silently from tree to tree in





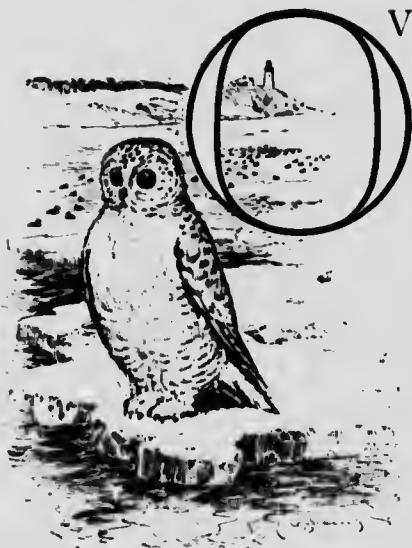
the woods beyond, watching our games with shy, silent interest. Did they learn their game from watching us at tag, and do they know coram, and leave-stocks, and prisoners' base, and bull-in-the-ring as well? One could easily believe their wise little black heads to be capable of any imitation, especially if one had ever owned a tame crow, or had followed the flock in the bright autumn days, when food is plenty and every crow is free from care as a schoolboy in vacation.

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## SNOWY VISITORS



**O**VER my table, as I write, is a big snowy owl, whose yellow eyes seem to be always watching me, whatever I do. Perhaps he is still wondering at the curious way in which he came to my den.

One stormy afternoon two winters ago, I was watching for black ducks by a lonely salt creek that doubled across the marshes from Maddaket Harbor. In the shadow of a low ridge I had built my blind among some bushes, near the freshest water. In front of me a solitary decoy was splashing about in joyous freedom





after having been confined all day, quacking loudly at the loneliness of the place and at being separated from her mate. Beside me, crouched in the blind, my old dog Don was trying his best to shiver himself warm without disturbing the bushes too much. That would have frightened the incoming ducks, as Don knew very well.

It grew dark and bitterly cold. No birds were flying, and I had stood up a moment to warm my half-frozen toes, when a shadow seemed to pass over my head. The next moment there was a splash, followed by loud quacks of alarm from the decoy. All I could make out, in the obscurity under the ridge, was a flutter of wings that rose heavily from the water, taking my duck with them. Only the anchor string prevented the marauder from getting away with his booty. Not wishing to shoot, for the decoy was a valuable one, I shouted, and sent out the dog. The decoy dropped with a splash, and in the darkness the thief got away—just vanished, like a shadow, without a sound.



Poor ducky died in my hands a moment later, the marks of cruel claws telling me plainly that the thief was an owl; though I had no suspicion then that it was the rare winter visitor from the North. I supposed that it was only a great horned owl, and so laid plans to get him.

Next night I was at the same spot with some wooden decoys, over which the skins of wild ducks had been carefully stretched. An hour after dark he came again, attracted, no doubt, by my continued quacking. I had another swift glimpse of what seemed only a shadow; saw it poise and shoot downward before I could find it with my gun-sight, striking the decoys with a great splash and clatter. Before he discovered his mistake I had him. The next moment Don came ashore, proud as a peacock, bringing a great snowy owl with him—a rare prize, worth ten times the trouble we had taken to get it.

Owls are generally very lean and muscular; so much so, in severe winters, when food is scarce, that they are unable to fly straight when the wind blows; and a

*Snowy Visitors*

twenty-knot breeze catches their broad wings and tosses them about helplessly. This one, however, was fat as a plover. When I stuffed him, I found that he had just eaten a big rat and a meadow-lark, hair, bones, feathers, and all. It would be interesting to know what he intended to do with the duck. Perhaps, like the crow, he has snug hiding places here and there, where he keeps things against a time of need.

Every severe winter a few of these beautiful owls find their way to the lonely places of the New England coast, driven southward by lack of food in the frozen North. Here, in Massachusetts, they prefer the southern shores of Cape Cod, and especially the island of Nantucket, where, besides the food cast up by the tides, there are larks and blackbirds and robins which linger all winter. At home, in the far North, the owls feed largely upon hares and grouse; here nothing comes amiss, from a stray cat, roving too far from the house, to stray mussels on the beach that have escaped the sharp eyes of crows and sea-gulls.



Some of his hunting ways are most curious. One winter day, in prowling along the beach, I approached the spot where, a day or two before, I had been shooting whistlers (golden-eye ducks) over decoys. The blind had been made by digging a hole in the sand. In the bottom was an armful of dry seaweed, to keep one's toes warm; and just behind the stand was the stump of a ship's mainmast, the relic of some old storm and shipwreck, cast up by the tide.

A commotion of some kind was going on in the blind as I drew near. Sand and seaweed were hurled up at intervals, to be swept aside by the wind. I dropped out of sight into the dead beach grass to watch and listen. Soon a white head and neck bristled up from behind the old mast, every feather standing straight out ferociously. The head was perfectly silent a moment, listening; then it twisted completely round, so as to look in every direction. A moment later it had disappeared, and the seaweed was flying again.



There was a prize in the old blind evidently. But what was he doing there? Till then I had supposed that the owl always takes his game from the wing. Farther along the beach was a sand bluff overlooking the proceedings. I gained it, after a careful stalk, crept to the edge and looked over. Down in the blind a big snowy owl was digging away like a Trojan, tearing out sand and seaweed with his great claws, first one foot then the other, like a hungry hen, and sending it up in showers behind him over the old mast. Every few moments he would stop, bristle up all his feathers till he looked comically big and fierce, take a look out over the log and along the beach, then fall to digging again furiously.

I suppose that the object of this bristling up before each observation was to strike terror into the heart of any enemy that might be approaching to surprise him at his unusual work. It is an owl trick. Wounded birds always use it when approached.

The object of the digging was soon apparent. A beach rat had jumped down into the

blind, after some fragments of my lunch, and, being unable to climb up the sheer sand walls, had started to tunnel up to the surface. The owl heard him at work, and started a stern chase. He won, too, for right in the midst of a fury of seaweed he shot up with the rat in his claws. Had it not been for the storm and his underground digging, he surely would have detected me long before I could get near enough to see what he was doing; for his eyes and ears are wonderfully keen.

In his southern visits, or perhaps on the ice fields of the Arctic ocean, he has discovered a more novel way of procuring his food than digging for it. He has turned fisherman and learned to fish. Once only have I seen him get his dinner in this way. It was on the north shore of Nantucket, one day in the winter of 1890-91, when the remarkable flight of white owls came down from the North. The bay was full of floating ice, and swimming about the shoals were thousands of coots. While watching the latter through my field glass, I noticed a snowy owl standing up still and straight on the edge of a big

*Snowy Visitors*

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ice cake. "Now what is that fellow doing there?" I thought. — "I know! He is trying to drift down close to that flock of coots before they see him."

That was interesting; so I sat down on a rock to watch. Whenever I took my eyes from him a moment, it was difficult to find him again, so perfectly did his plumage blend with the white ice whereon he stood motionless.

But he was not after the coots. I saw him lean forward suddenly and plunge a foot into the water. Then, when he hopped back from the edge, and appeared to be eating something, it dawned upon me that he was fishing — and fishing like a true sportsman, out on the ice alone, with only his own skill to depend upon. In a few minutes he struck again, and this time rose with a fine fish, which he carried to the shore to devour at leisure.

For a long time that fish was to me the most puzzling thing in the whole incident; for at that season no large fish are to be found, except in deep water off shore. Some

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weeks later I learned that, just previous to the incident, several fishermen's dories, with full fares, had been upset on the east side of the island when trying to land through a heavy surf. The dead fish had been carried around by the tides, and the owl had been deceived into showing his method of fishing. In his northern home, when the ice breaks up and the salmon are running, he goes fishing from an ice cake as a regular occupation.

The owl lit upon a knoll, not two hundred yards from where I sat motionless, and gave me a good opportunity of watching him at his meal. He treated the fish exactly as he would have treated a rat or duck: stood on it with one foot, gripped the long claws of the other through it, and tore it to pieces savagely, as one would a bit of paper. The beak was not used, except to receive the pieces, which were conveyed up to it by his foot, as a parrot eats. He devoured everything, even to the bones, in great hungry mouthfuls. Then he hopped to the top of the knoll, sat up straight, puffed out his





feathers to look big, and went to sleep. But with the first slight movement I made to creep nearer, he heard me and was wide awake, and flew to a higher point. Such hearing is simply marvelous.

The stomach of an owl is peculiar, there being no intermediate crop, as in other birds. Every part of his prey small enough (and the mouth and throat of an owl are large out of all proportion) is greedily swallowed. Long after the flesh is digested, feathers, fur and bones remain in the stomach, softened by acids, till everything is absorbed that can afford nourishment, even to the quill shafts, and the ends and marrow of bones. The dry remains are then rolled into pellets by the stomach and disgorged.

This, by the way, suggests the best method of finding an owl's haunts. It is to search, not overhead, but on the ground under large trees, till a pile of these curious remnants of savage feasting reveals the nest or roosting place above.

It seems remarkable that my fisherman-owl did not make a try at the coots that were

so plenty about him. Rarely, I think, does he attempt to strike a bird of any kind in the daytime. His long training at the North, where the days are several months long, has adapted his eyes to seeing perfectly, both in sunshine and in darkness; and with us he spends the greater part of each day hunting along the beaches. The birds at such times are never molested. He seems to know that he is not good at dodging; that they are all quicker than he, and are not to be caught napping. And the birds, even the little birds, have no fear of him in the sunshine; though they shiver themselves to sleep when they think of him at night.

I have seen the snowbirds twittering contentedly near him. Once I saw him fly out to sea in the midst of a score of gulls, which paid no attention to him. At another time I saw him fly over a large flock of wild ducks that were preening themselves in the grass. He kept straight on; and the ducks merely stopped their toilet for an instant, and turned up one eye so as to see him better. Had it been dusk, the whole flock





would have shot up into the air at the first startled quack—all but one, which would have stayed with the owl.

His favorite time for hunting is the hour after dusk, or just before daylight, when birds are restless on the roost. No bird is safe from him then. The fierce eyes search through every tree and bush and bunch of grass. The keen ears detect every faintest chirp, or rustle, or scratching of tiny claws on the roost. Nothing that can be called a sound escapes them. The broad, soft wings tell no tale of his presence, and his swoop is swift and sure. He utters no sound. Like a good Nimrod, he hunts silently.

The flight of an owl, noiseless as the sweep of a cloud shadow, is the most remarkable thing about him. The wings are wonderfully adapted to the silent movement that is essential to surprising birds at dusk. The feathers are long and soft. The laminae extending from the wing quills, instead of ending in the sharp feather-edge of other birds, are all drawn out to fine hair

points, through which the air can make no sound as it rushes in the swift wing-beats. The *whish* of a duck's wings can be heard two or three hundred yards on a still night. The wings of an eagle rustle like silk in the wind, as he mounts upward. A sparrow's wings flutter or whir as he changes his flight. Every one knows the startled rush of a quail or grouse. But no ear ever heard the passing of a great owl, spreading his five-foot wings in rapid flight.

He knows well, however, when to vary his program. Once I saw him hovering at dusk over some wild land covered with bushes and dead grass, a favorite winter haunt of meadow-larks. His manner showed that he knew his game was near. He kept hovering over a certain spot, swinging off noiselessly to right or left, only to return again. Suddenly he struck his wings over his head with a loud flap and swooped instantly. It was a clever trick. The bird beneath had been waked by the sound, or startled into turning his head. With the first movement the owl had him.

*Snowy Visitors*



All owls have the habit of sitting still upon some high point which harmonizes with the general color of their feathers, and swooping upon any sound or movement that indicates game. The long-eared, or eagle-owl invariably selects a dark-colored stub, on top of which he appears as a part of the tree itself, and is seldom noticed; while the snowy owl, whose general color is soft gray, will search out a birch or lightning-blasted stump, and sitting up still and straight, so hide himself in plain sight that it takes a good eye to find him.

The swooping habit leads them into queer mistakes sometimes. Two or three times, when sitting still in the woods watching for birds, my head has been mistaken for a rat or squirrel, or some other furry quadruped, by owls, which swooped and brushed me with their wings, and once left the marks of their claws, before discovering their mistake.

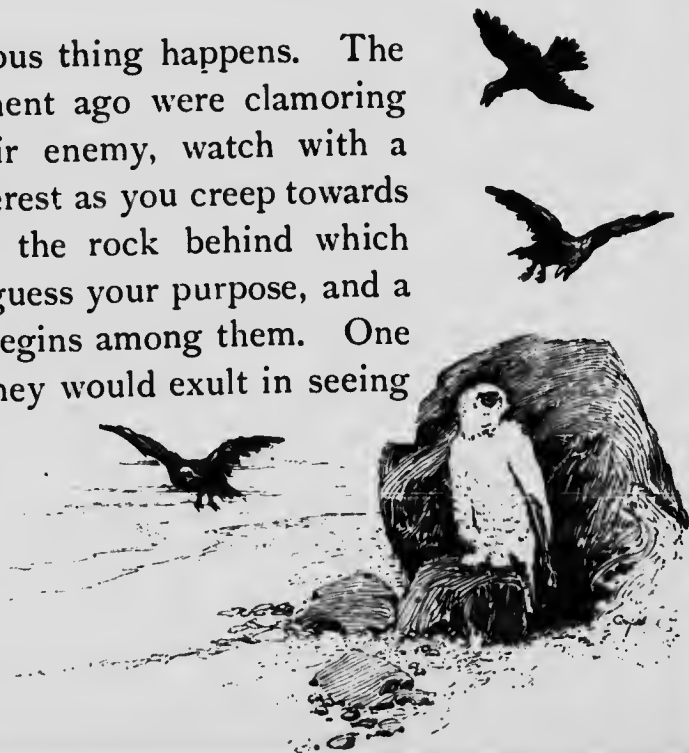
Sometimes the crows find one of these snowy visitors on the beach, and make a great fuss and racket, as they always do when an owl is in sight. At such times he

takes his stand under a bank, or in the lee of a rock, where the crows cannot trouble him from behind, and sits watching them fiercely. Woe be to the one that ventures too near! A plunge, a grip of his claw, a weak *caw*, and it's all over. That seems to double the crows' frenzy — and that is the one moment when you can approach the owl rapidly from behind. But you must drop flat when the crows perceive you; for the owl is sure to take a look around for the cause of their sudden alarm. If he sees nothing suspicious, he will return to his shelter to eat his crow, or just to rest his sensitive ears after all the pother. Some distance away the crows sit silent, watching you and him.

And now a curious thing happens. The crows, that a moment ago were clamoring angrily about their enemy, watch with a kind of intense interest as you creep towards him. Halfway to the rock behind which he is hiding, they guess your purpose, and a low rapid chatter begins among them. One would think that they would exult in seeing

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*Snowy Visitors*





him surprised and killed; but that is not crow nature. They would gladly worry the owl to death, if they could; but they will not stand by and see him slain by a common enemy. The chatter ceases suddenly. Two or three swift fliers leave the flock, circle around you, and speed over the rock, uttering short notes of alarm. With the first sharp note, which all birds seem to understand, the owl springs into the air, turns, sees you, and is off up the beach. The crows rush after him with crazy clamor, and speedily drive him to cover again.— But spare yourself more trouble. It is useless to try stalking any game while the crows are watching.

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**S**OMETIMES, on a winter walk, you meet a flock of stranger birds—fluffy gray visitors, almost as large as a robin—flying about the lawns with soft whistling calls, or feeding on the ground, so tame and fearless that they barely move aside as you approach. The beak is short and thick; the back of the head and a large patch just above the tail are golden brown; and across the wings are narrow double bars of white. All the rest is soft gray, dark above and light

*A  
Christmas  
Carol*

beneath. If you watch them on the ground, you will see that they have a curious way of moving about, like a golden-winged woodpecker in the same position. Now they put one foot before the other, in a funny little attempt at a dignified walk, like the black-birds; again they hop like a robin, but much more awkwardly, as if they were not accustomed to walking, and did not quite know how to use their feet — which is quite true.

The birds are pine-grosbeaks, and are somewhat irregular winter visitors from the far North. Only when the cold is most severe, and the snow lies deep about Hudson Bay, do they leave their nesting places to spend a few weeks in bleak New England as a winter resort. Their stay with us is short and uncertain. Long ere the first bluebird has whistled to us from the old fence rail, the grosbeaks are whistling of spring, and singing their love songs in the forests of Labrador.

A curious thing about the flocks we see in winter is that they are composed almost entirely of females. The male bird is very

rare with us. You can tell him instantly by his brighter color and his beautiful crimson breast. Sometimes the flocks contain a few young males; but until the first mating season has tipped their breast feathers with deep crimson, they are almost indistinguishable from their sober-colored companions.

This crimson breast shield, by the way, is the family mark or coat of arms of the grosbeaks, just as the scarlet crest marks all the woodpeckers. And if you ask a Micmac, deep in the woods, how the grosbeak got his shield, he may tell you a story that will interest you as did the legend of Hiawatha and the woodpecker in your childhood days.

If the old male, with his proud crimson, be rare with us, his beautiful song is still more so. Only in the deep forests, by the lonely rivers of the far North, where no human ear ever hears, does he greet the sunrise from the top of some lofty spruce. There also he pours into the ears of his sober little gray wife the sweetest love song of the birds. It is a flood of soft warbling notes, tinkling like a brook deep under the

*A  
Christmas  
Carol*



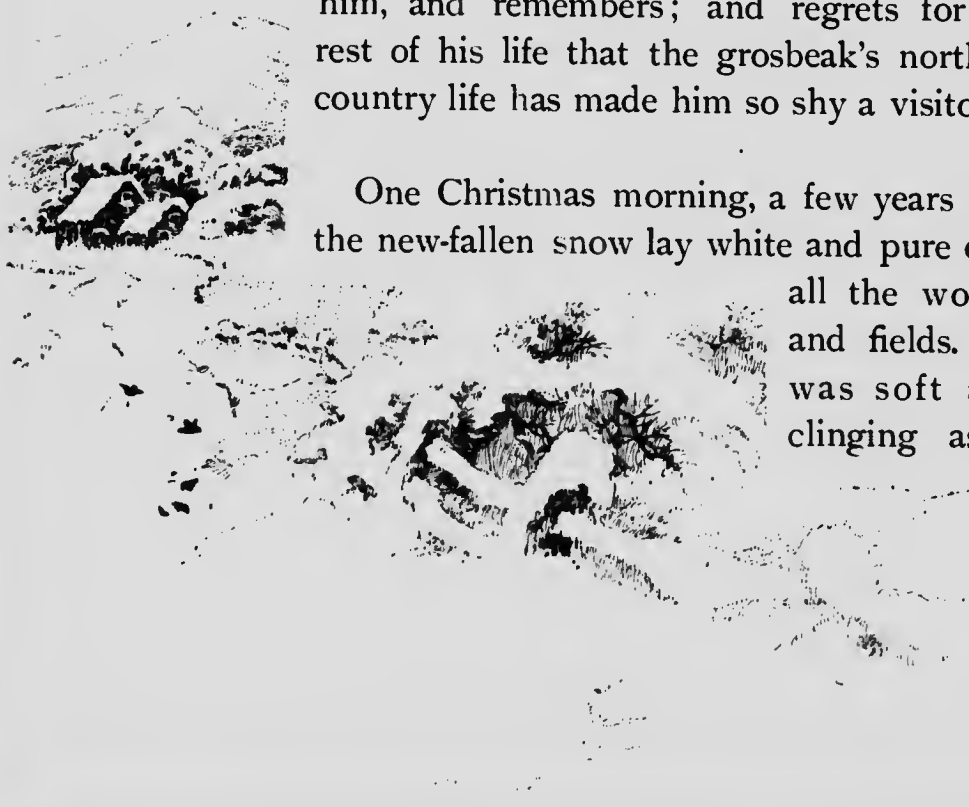
*A  
Christmas  
Carol*



ice, tumbling over each other in a quiet ecstasy of harmony; mellow as the song of the hermit thrush, but much softer, as if he feared lest any should hear but her to whom he sang. Those who know the music of the rose-breasted grosbeak (not his robin-like song of spring, but the exquisitely soft warble to his brooding mate) may multiply its sweetness indefinitely, and so form an idea of what the pine-grosbeak's song is like.

But sometimes he forgets himself in his winter visit, and sings as other birds do, just because his world is bright; and then, once in a lifetime, a New England bird lover hears him, and remembers; and regrets for the rest of his life that the grosbeak's northern country life has made him so shy a visitor.

One Christmas morning, a few years ago, the new-fallen snow lay white and pure over all the woods and fields. It was soft and clinging as it



fell on Christmas eve. Now every old wall and fence was a carved bench of gleaming white; every post and stub had a soft white robe and a tall white hat; and every little bush and thicket was a perfect fairyland of white arches and glistening columns, and dark grottoes walled about with delicate frostwork of silver and jewels. And then the glory, dazzling beyond all words, when the sun rose and shone upon it!

Before sunrise I was out. Soon the jumping flight and cheery good-morning of a downy woodpecker led me to an old field with scattered evergreen clumps. There is no better time for a quiet peep at the birds than the morning after a snowstorm, and no better place than the evergreens. If you can find them at all (which is not certain, for they have mysterious ways of disappearing before a storm), you will find them unusually quiet, and willing to bear your scrutiny indifferently, instead of flying off into deeper coverts.

I had scarcely crossed the wall when I stopped at hearing a new bird song, so

*A  
Christmas  
Carol*





amazingly sweet that it could only be a Christmas message, yet so out of place that the listener stood doubting whether his ears were playing him false, wondering whether the music or the landscape would not suddenly vanish as an unreal thing. The song was continuous—a soft melodious warble, full of sweetness and suggestion; but suggestion of June meadows and a summer sunrise, rather than of snow-packed evergreens and Christmastide. To add to the unreality, no ear could tell where the song came from; its own muffled quality disguised the source perfectly. I searched the trees in front; there was no bird there. I looked behind; there was no place for a bird to sing. I remembered the redstart, how he calls sometimes from among the rocks, and refuses to show himself, and runs and hides when you look for him. I searched the wall; but not a bird track marked the snow. All the while the wonderful carol went on, now in the air, now close beside me, growing more and more bewildering as I listened. It took me a good half-hour to locate the sound; then I under-

stood. Near me was a solitary fir tree with a bushy top. The bird, whoever he was, had gone to sleep up there, close against the trunk, as birds do, for protection. During the night the soft snow gathered thicker and thicker upon the flexible branches. Their tips bent with the weight till they touched the trunk below, forming a green bower, about which the snow packed all night long, till it was completely closed in. The bird was a prisoner inside, and singing as the morning sun shone in through the walls of his prison-house.

As I listened, delighted with the carol and the minstrel's novel situation, a mass of snow, loosened by the sun, slid from the snow bower, and a pine-grosbeak appeared in the doorway. A moment he seemed to look about curiously over the new, white, beautiful world; then he hopped to the topmost twig and, turning his crimson breast to the sunrise, poured out his morning song; no longer muffled, but sweet and clear as a wood-thrush bell ringing the sunset.

*A  
Christmas  
Carol*





*A  
Christmas  
Carol*



Once, long afterward, I heard his softer love song, and found his nest in the heart of a New Brunswick forest. Till then it was not known that he ever nested south of Labrador. But even that, and the joy of discovery, lacked the charm of this rare sweet carol, coming all unsought and unexpected, as good things do, while our own birds were spending the Christmas time and singing the sunrise in Florida.

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# KILLOOLEET, LITTLE SWEET VOICE





## KILLOOLEET, LITTLE SWEET-VOICE



HE day was cold, the woods were wet, and the weather was trying patience and temper sorely when Killooleet first came and sang on my ridgepole. Fishing was poor down in the big lake, and there were signs of civilization here and there,

which we did not like; so we had pushed up river, Simmo and I, thirty miles in the rain, to a smaller lake, where we had the wilderness all to ourselves.

The rain was still falling, the lake white-capped, and the forest all misty and



wind-blown when we ran our canoes ashore by the old cedar that marked our camping ground. First we built a big fire to dry some boughs to sleep upon; then we put up our houses, Simmo a bark *commoosic*, and I a little tent; and I was inside, getting dry clothes out of a rubber bag, when I heard a white-throated sparrow calling cheerily his Indian name, *O hear, sweet Killooleet-lillooleet-lillooleet!* And the sound was so sunny, so good to hear in the steady drip of rain on the roof, that I went out to see the little fellow who had bid us welcome to the wilderness.

Simmo had heard too. He was on his hands and knees, just his dark face peering by the corner stake of his *commoosic*, so as to see better the little singer on my tent. — "Have better weather and better luck now. Killooleet sing on ridgepole," he said confidently. Then we spread some cracker crumbs for the guest and turned in to sleep till better times.

That was the beginning of a long acquaintance. It was also the first of many social

calls from a whole colony of white-throats (Tom-Peabody birds) that lived on the mountain-side, behind my tent, and that came one by one to sing to us, and to get acquainted, and to share our crumbs. Sometimes, in rainy weather, when the woods seemed wetter than the lake, and Simmo would be sleeping philosophically, and I reading, or tying trout flies in the tent, I would hear a gentle stir and a rustle under the tent fly. Then, if I crept out quietly, I would find Killooleet exploring my goods to find where the crackers grew, or just resting contentedly under the fly, where it was dry and comfortable.

It was good to live here among them, with the mountain at our backs and the lake at our feet, and peace breathing in every breeze or brooding silently over the place at twilight. Rain or shine, day or night, these white-throated sparrows are the sunniest, cheeriest folk to be found anywhere in the woods. I grew to understand and love the Milicete name, Killooleet, Little Sweet-Voice, for its expressiveness.

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*Killooleet,  
Little  
Sweet  
Voice*





"Hour-Bird" the Micmacs call him; for they say he sings every hour, and so tells the time, "all same's one white man's watch." And indeed there is rarely an hour, day or night, in the northern woods when you cannot hear Killlooleet singing. Other birds grow silent after they have won their mates; or they grow fat and lazy as summer advances, absorbed in the care of their young, and have no time nor thought for singing. But not so Killlooleet. He is kinder to his mate after he has won her, and never lets selfishness or the summer steal away his music; for he knows that the woods are brighter for his singing.

Sometimes, at night, I would take a brand from the fire, and follow a deer path that wound about the mountain, or steal away into a dark thicket and strike a parlor match. As the flame shot up, lighting its little circle of waiting leaves, there would be a stir beside me in the underbrush, or overhead in the fir; then tinkling out of the darkness, like a brook under the snow, would come the low clear strain of melody that always

set my heart a-dancing, — *I'm here, sweet Killoolect-lilloolect-lilloolect*, — the good-night song of my gentle neighbor. Then along the path a little way, and another match, and another song to make one better and his rest sweeter.

By day I used to listen to them, hours long at a stretch, practising to perfect their song. These were the younger birds; and for a long time they puzzled me. Those who know Killoolect's song will remember that it begins with three clear sweet notes; but very few have observed the break between the second and third of these. I noticed, first of all, that certain birds would start the song twenty times in succession, yet never get beyond the second note. And when I crept up, to find out about it, I would find them sitting disconsolately, deep in shadow, instead of out in the light where they love to sing, with a pitiful little droop of wings and tail, and the air of failure and dejection in every movement. Then again, these same singers would touch the third note; and always, in such cases, they would prolong the last trill,

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**Killoolect,  
Little  
Sweet  
Voice**







the *lillooleet-lillooleet*, to an indefinite length, instead of stopping at the second or third repetition, which is the rule with good singers. Then they would come out of the shadow, and stir about briskly, and sing again with an air of triumph.

One day, while lying still in the underbrush, watching a wood mouse, Killooleet, a fine male bird and a perfect singer, came and sang on a branch just over my head, not noticing me. Then I discovered that there is a trill, a tiny grace note or yodel, at the end of his second note. I listened carefully to other singers, as close as I could get, and found that it is always there, and is the one difficult part of the song. You must be very close to the bird to appreciate the beauty of this little yodel; for ten feet away it sounds like a faint *cluck*, interrupting the flow of the third note; and a little farther away you cannot hear it at all.

Whatever its object, Killooleet regards this as the indispensable part of his song, and never goes on to the third note unless he gets the second perfectly. That accounts



He had mastered the trill perfectly



for the many times when one hears only the first two notes. That accounts also for the occasional prolonged trill which one hears; for when a young bird has tried many times for his grace note without success, and then gets it unexpectedly, he is so pleased with himself that he forgets he is not Whippoorwill, who tries to sing as long as the brook without stopping, and so keeps up the final *lilloolet-lilloolet* as long as he has an atom of breath left to do it with.

But of all the Killooleets, — and there were many that I soon recognized, either by their songs or by some peculiarity in their striped caps or brown jackets, — the most interesting was the one who first perched on my ridgepole and bade me welcome to his camping ground. I soon learned to distinguish him easily; his cap was bright, and his white cravat very full, and his song never stopped at the second note; for he had mastered the trill perfectly. Then, too, he was more friendly and fearless than all the others. The morning after our arrival (it was better weather, as Simmo and Killoolet had

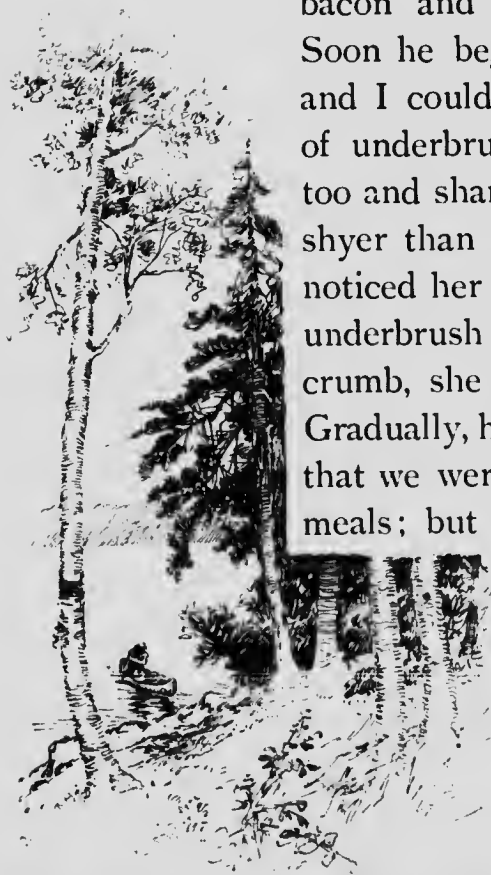
***Killoolet,  
Little  
Sweet  
Voice***





predicted) we were eating breakfast by the fire, when he lit on the ground close by, and turned his head sidewise to look at us curiously. I tossed him a big crumb, which made him run away in fright; but when he thought we were not looking he stole back, touched, tasted, ate the whole of it. And when I threw him another crumb, he hopped to meet it.

After that he came regularly to meals, and would look critically over the tin plate which I placed at my feet, and pick and choose daintily from the cracker and trout and bacon and porridge which I offered him. Soon he began to take bits away with him, and I could hear him, just inside the fringe of underbrush, persuading his mate to come too and share his plate. But she was much shyer than he; it was several days before I noticed her flitting in and out of the shadowy underbrush; and when I tossed her the first crumb, she flew away in a terrible fright. Gradually, however, Killooleet persuaded her that we were kindly, and she came often to meals; but she would never come near, to



eat from my tin plate, till after I had gone away.

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Never a day now passed that one or both of the birds did not rest on my tent. When I put my head out, like a turtle out of his shell, in the early morning, to look at the weather, Killooleet would look down from the projecting end of the ridgepole and sing good-morning. And when I had been out late on the lake, night-fishing, or following the inlet for beaver, or watching the grassy points for caribou, or just drifting along shore silently to catch the night sounds and smells of the woods, I would listen with eager anticipation for Killooleet's welcome as I approached the landing. He had learned to recognize the sounds of my coming, the rub of a careless paddle, the ripple of water under the bow, or the grating of pebbles on the beach; and with Simmo asleep and the fire low, it was good to be welcomed back by a cheery little voice in the darkness; for he always sang when he heard me. Sometimes I would try to surprise him; but his sleep was too light and

*Killooleet,  
Little  
Sweet  
Voice*





his ears too keen. The canoe would glide up to the old cedar and touch the shore noiselessly; but with the first crunch of gravel under my foot, or the rub of my canoe as I lifted it out, he would waken; and his song, all sweetness and cheer, *I'm here, sweet Killooleet-lillooleet-lillooleet*, would ripple out of the dark underbrush where his nest was.

I am glad now to think that I never saw that nest, though it was scarcely ten yards from my tent, until after the young had flown, and Killooleet cared no more about it. I knew the bush in which it was, close by the deer path; could pick out from my fireplace the thick branch that sheltered it; for I often watched the birds coming and going. I have no doubt that Killooleet would have welcomed me there without fear; but his mate never laid aside her shyness about it, never went to it directly when I was looking, and I knew he would like me better if I respected her little secret.

Soon, from the mate's infrequent visits, and from the amount of food which Killoo-

leet took away with him, I knew she was brooding her eggs. And when, at last, both birds came together and, instead of helping themselves hungrily, each took the largest morsel he could carry and hurried away to the nest, I knew that the little ones were come; and I spread the plate more liberally, and moved it away to the foot of the old cedar, where Killooleet's mate would not be afraid to come at any time.

One day, not long after, as I sat at a late breakfast after the morning's fishing, there was a great stir in the underbrush. Presently Killooleet came skipping out, all fuss and feathers, running back and forth with an air of immense importance between the last bush and the plate by the cedar, crying out in his own way, "Here it is, here it is, all right, just by the old tree as usual. Crackers, trout, brown bread, porridge; come on, come on; don't be afraid. *He's* here, but he won't harm. I know him. Come on, come on!"

Soon his little gray mate appeared, under the last bush, and after much circumspection







came hopping towards the breakfast; and after her, in a long line, five little Killooleets, hopping, fluttering, cheeping, stumbling, — all in a fright at the big world, but all in a desperate hurry for crackers and porridge *ad libitum*; now casting hungry eyes at the plate under the old cedar, now stopping to turn their heads sidewise to see the big kind animal with only two legs, that Killooleet had told them about, no doubt, many times.

After that we had often seven guests to breakfast, instead of two. It was good to hear them, the lively *tink, tink-a-tink* of their little bills on the tin plate in a merry tattoo, as I ate my own tea and trout thankfully. I had only to raise my eyes to see them in a bobbing brown ring about my bounty; and, just beyond them, the lap of ripples on the beach, the lake glinting far away in the sunshine, and a bark canoe fretting at the landing, swinging, veering, nodding at the ripples, and beckoning me to come away as soon as I had finished my breakfast.

Before the little Killooleets had grown accustomed to things, however, occurred the most delicious bit of our summer camping. It was only a day or two after their first appearance; they knew simply that crumbs and a welcome awaited them at my camp, but had not yet learned that the tin plate in the cedar roots was their special portion. Simmo had gone off at daylight, looking up beaver signs for his fall trapping. I had just returned from the morning fishing, and was getting breakfast, when I saw an otter come out into the lake from a cold brook over on the east shore. Grabbing a handful of figs, and some pilot bread from the cracker box, I paddled away after the otter; for that is an animal which one has small chance to watch nowadays. Besides, I had found a den over near the brook, and I wanted to find out, if possible, how a mother otter teaches her young to swim. For, though otters live much in the water and love it, the young ones are afraid of it as so many kittens. So the mother —

*Killooleet,  
Little  
Sweet  
Voice*





But I must tell about that elsewhere. I did not find out that day; for the young were already good swimmers. I watched the den two or three hours from a good hiding place, and got several glimpses of the mother and the little ones. On the way back I ran into a little bay, where a mother sheldrake was teaching her brood to dive and catch trout. There was also a big frog that always sat in the same place, and that I used to watch. Then I thought of a trap, two miles away, which Simmo had set, and went to see if Nemox, the cunning fisher, who destroys the sable traps in winter, had been caught at his own game. So it was afternoon, and I was hungry, when I paddled back to camp. It occurred to me suddenly that Killooleet might be hungry too; for I had neglected to feed him. He had grown sleek and comfortable of late, and never went insect hunting when he could get cold fried trout and corn bread.

I landed silently and stole up to the tent to see if he were exploring under the fly, as he sometimes did when I was away. A

I curious sound, a hollow *tunk, tunk, tunk, tunk-a-tunk*, grew louder as I approached. I stole to the big cedar, where I could see the fireplace and the little opening before my tent, and noticed first that I had left the cracker box open (it was almost empty) when I hurried away after the otter. The curious sound was inside, growing more eager every moment — *tunk, tunk, tunk-a-trrrrrrrr-runk, tunk, tunk!*

I crept on my hands and knees to the box, to see what queer thing had found his way to the crackers, and peeped cautiously over the edge. There were Killooleet, and Mrs. Killooleet, and the five little Killooleets, just seven hopping brown backs and bobbing heads, helping themselves to the crackers. And the sound of their bills on the empty box made the jolliest tattoo that ever came out of a camping kit.

I crept away more cautiously than I had come and, standing carelessly in my tent door, whistled the call I always used in feeding the birds. Like a flash Killooleet appeared on the edge of the cracker box,

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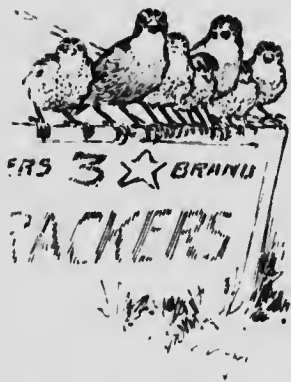
**Killooleet,  
Little  
Sweet  
Voice**





looking very much surprised. "I thought you were away; why, I thought you were away," he seemed to be saying. Then he clucked, and the *tunk-a-tunk* ceased instantly. Another cluck, and Mrs. Killooleet appeared, looking frightened; then, one after another, the five little Killooleets bobbed up; and there they sat in a solemn row on the edge of the cracker box, turning their heads side-wise to see me better.

"There!" said Killooleet, "did n't I tell you he would n't hurt you?" And like five winks the five little Killooleets were back in the box, and the *tunk-a-tunking* began again.



This assurance that they might do as they pleased, and help themselves undisturbed to whatever they found, seemed to remove the last doubt from the mind of even the little gray mate. After that they stayed, most of the time, close about my tent, and were never so far away, or so busy insect hunting, that they would not come when I whistled and scattered crumbs. The little Killooleets grew amazingly, and no wonder! They were always eating, always hungry. I took

good pains to give them less than they wanted, and so had the satisfaction of feeding them often, and of finding their tin plate picked clean whenever I came back from fishing.

Did the woods seem lonely to Killooleet when we paddled away, at last, and left the wilderness for another year? That is a question which I would give much, or watch long, to answer. There is always a regret at leaving a good camping ground; but I had never packed up so unwillingly before. Killooleet was singing, cheery as ever; but my own heart gave a minor chord of sadness to his trill that was not there when he sang on my ridgepole. Before leaving I had baked a loaf, big and hard, which I fastened with stakes at the foot of the old cedar, with a tin plate under it and a bark roof above, so that when it rained, and insects were hidden under the leaves, and their hunting was no fun because the woods were wet, Killooleet and his little ones would find food, and remember me. And so we paddled away and left them to the wilderness.





A year later my canoe touched the same old landing. For ten months I had been in the city, where Killooleet never sings, and where the wilderness is only a memory. In the fall, on some long tramps, I had occasional glimpses of the little singer, solitary now and silent, stealing southward ahead of the winter. In the spring he showed himself rarely in the underbrush, on country roads, eager, restless, chirping, hurrying northward where the streams were clear and the big woods budding. But never a song in all that time; my ears were hungry for his voice as I leaped out to run eagerly to the big cedar. There were the stakes, and the tin plate, and the bark roof all crushed by the snows of winter. The bread was gone; what Killooleet had spared, Tookhees the wood mouse had eaten thankfully. I found the old tent poles and put up my house leisurely, a hundred happy memories thronging about me. In the midst of them came a call, a clear whistle, — and there he was, the same full cravat, the same bright cap, and the same perfect song to set my nerves

a-tingling: *I'm here, sweet Killooleet-lilloolect-lilloolect!* And when I put crumbs by the old fireplace, he flew down to help himself, and went off with the biggest one, as of yore, to a new nest by the deer path.

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***Killooleet,  
Little  
Sweet  
Voice***

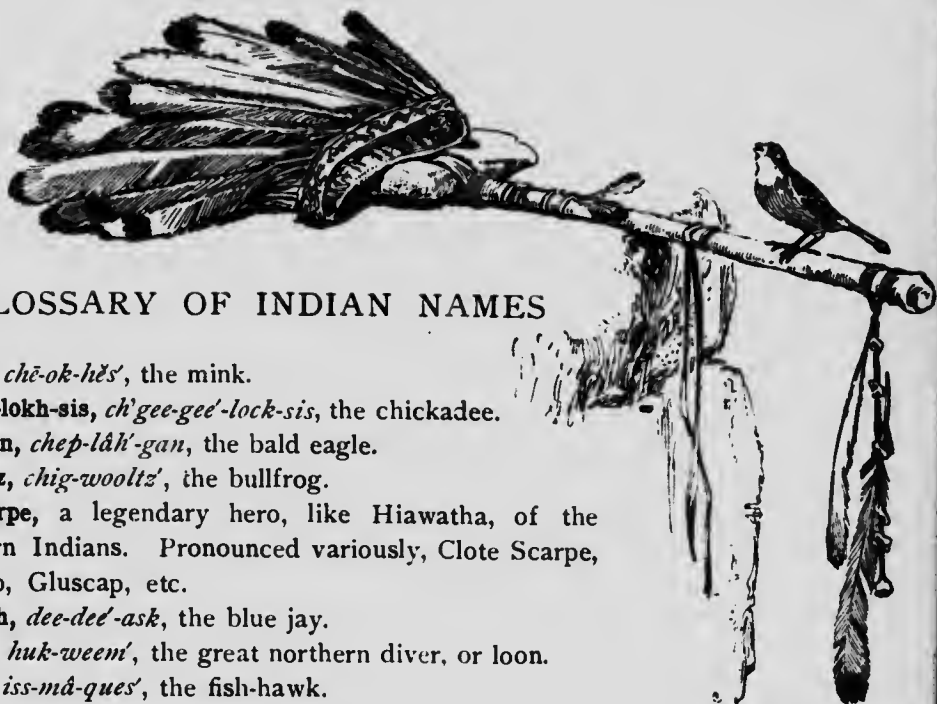












## GLOSSARY OF INDIAN NAMES

- Cheokhes**, *chē-ok-hēs'*, the mink.  
**Ch'geegee-lokh-sis**, *ch'gee-geé'-lock-sis*, the chickadee.  
**Cheplahgan**, *chep-lâh'-gan*, the bald eagle.  
**Chigwooltz**, *chig-wooltz'*, the bullfrog.  
**Clôte Scarpe**, a legendary hero, like Hiawatha, of the Northern Indians. Pronounced variously, Clote Scarpe, Groscap, Gluscap, etc.  
**Deedeaskh**, *dee-deé'-ask*, the blue jay.  
**Hukweem**, *huk-weem'*, the great northern diver, or loon.  
**Ismaques**, *iss-mâ-ques'*, the fish-hawk.  
**Kagax**, *kâg'-âx*, the weasel.  
**Kakagos**, *kâ-kâ-gôs'*, the raven.  
**Keeokuskh**, *keé'-kusk'*, the muskrat.  
**Keeonekh**, *keé'-o-nek*, the otter.  
**Killooleet**, *kil'-loo-leet'*, the white-throated sparrow.  
**Kookooskoos**, *koo-koo-skoos'*, the great horned owl.  
**Koskomenos**, *kôs'-kôm-e-nôs'*, the kingfisher.  
**Kupkawis**, *cup-kâ'-wis*, the barred owl.  
**Kwaseekho**, *kwâ-see'k'-ho*, the sheldrake.  
**Lhoks**, *locks*, the panther.  
**Malsun**, *mâl'-sun*, the wolf.  
**Meeko**, *mee'k'-ô*, the red squirrel.  
**Megaleep**, *meg'-â-leep*, the caribou.

- 310 **Milicete**, *mil'-t-cete*, the name of an Indian tile; written also Malicete.
- Mitches**, *mit-chēs*, the birch partridge, or ruffed grouse.
- Moktaques**, *mok-tā'-ques*, the hare.
- Mooween**, *moo-ween'*, the black bear.
- Musquash**, *mus'-quāsh*, the muskrat.
- Nemox**, *nēm'-ox*, the fisher.
- Pekquam**, *pek-wām'*, the fisher.
- Seksagadagee**, *sek'-sā-gā-dā'-gee*, the Canada grouse, or spruce partridge.
- Skooktum**, *skook'-tum*, the trout.
- Tookhees**, *tōk'-hees*, the wood mouse.
- Upweekis**, *up-week'-iss*, the Canada lynx.

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written

pruce

