

Strange Adventures in Dicky-bird Land

STORIES TOLD BY MOTHER BIRDS
TO AMUSE THEIR CHICKS
OVERHEARD

BY

R. KEARTON, F.Z.S.

AND ILLUSTRATED FROM
PHOTOS BY C. KEARTON

WILD BIRDS'
PROTECTION
ACT

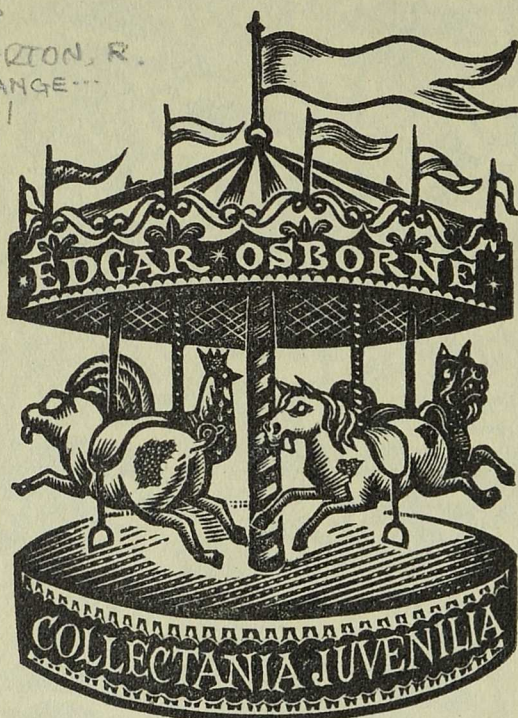


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STRANGE

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To Elsie Fletcher
from Annie Ada-



"TIT-BITS FOR CHARLIE." (SEE PAGE 9.)

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TO AMUSE THEIR CHICKS

AND OVERHEARD BY

R. KEARTON, F.Z.S.

ILLUSTRATED WITH

PHOTOGRAPHS DIRECT FROM NATURE BY
CHERRY KEARTON

CASSELL AND COMPANY, LIMITED

LONDON, PARIS, NEW YORK & MELBOURNE

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INTRODUCTION.

MY DEAR BOYS AND GIRLS,—A queer idea has just struck me. King Solomon said there was “nothing new under the sun,” and I am wondering if he ever thought of the introduction to a children’s book being penned by the author while he was hiding inside the body of a stuffed ox.

Whether he did or not it is certain that your humble servant is writing these lines in the interior of the strange animal figured on page 150.

Rather cramped quarters, and a trifle stuffy, too, it must be admitted, especially during the prevalence of hot weather, but nevertheless admirably suited to our requirements. For what wild bird or beast would ever dream that a man with a camera or note-book

and pencil was lurking unseen inside a great mild-eyed ox, and studying its shy ways only at arm's length?

The interesting story of this dummy bullock, by means of which we have found out some of the secrets of wild Nature as the Greeks of old entered Troy in their wooden horse, will be told more fully one of these days, and the account illustrated by a number of the wonderful pictures obtained from the peep-hole in its breast.

In the meantime let me tell you something of the purpose and character of this little book.

My great desire is to induce you to take an intelligent interest in the ways of the wild creatures of our land, and with this end in view I have adopted the short story method of imparting information, in the hope of catching the ear of as many readers as possible. Although I appeal to you in the guise of fiction, I do not think I

have written of anything which has not actually happened in real bird life or that may not happen again to-morrow. In fact I have myself observed many of the adventures described, during the course of my ramblings up and down the loneliest parts of the British Islands.

I think I can claim one novel feature at least for the little volume. It is, so far as I know, the first work of fiction to be illustrated throughout from actual photographs of the characters living and moving within its pages.

In regard to these pictures I would like to point out particularly that although the book is intended "only for children" as some thoughtless people would say, it contains a series of photographs which has cost my brother and myself more hard work, time, and trouble to secure than that appearing in any other book we have hitherto produced. Of this fact I feel rather proud, because I am a great believer

in the sound teaching powers of accurate pictures.

Let me instance the difficulties that had to be encountered in the procuring of one or two photographs only. Days were spent in figuring the Merlin Hawk (p. 81) on her nest. On one occasion the photographer was chased by a bull, and very nearly caught too, while approaching the bird's home with his camera, yet he tried again, and his effort only ended in a six hours' fruitless wait for his "sitter" to come back to her nest. All this time he was hiding in a most cramped position, whilst hailstones danced through his heather-covered rubbish-heap at frequent intervals, and the cold wind made his teeth chatter upon each other like a brook. A Briton does not love being beaten, however, and he tried again and again until his efforts were finally crowned by success.

The frontispiece cost two special

journeys from Surrey to Stratford-on-Avon, and the exposure of over one pound's worth of photographic plates before we secured exactly what we wanted, and such illustrations as the trout in the water, the domestic rat, the fox cub, and a score of others, cost an amount of patient labour of which few people could even dream.

These things are not mentioned in any spirit of boasting, but just in order to impress upon you the fact that we have taken some pains that you should have an opportunity of seeing Nature's children exactly as they are amidst their own wild surroundings.

Our most grateful thanks are tendered herewith to Messrs. Charles and Frank Rutley of Birchwood, Mr. Walpole Greenwell of Marden Park, the Rev. M. C. H. Bird of Stalham, Mr. G. Armstrong of Tillingdown, Mr. John Harker of Nutfield, Mr. Reginald Hudson of Birmingham, Mr. James Alderson of

Potts Valley, Mr. William Alderson of Thringill, and many other friends who have given us most ungrudgingly all the help and facilities we have needed in the procuring of the pictures scattered up and down this volume.

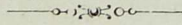
My concluding hope is that the little work may afford you as much pleasure in the reading as it has given my brother and myself in the gathering together.

Your Ever Faithful Friend,

R. KEARTON.

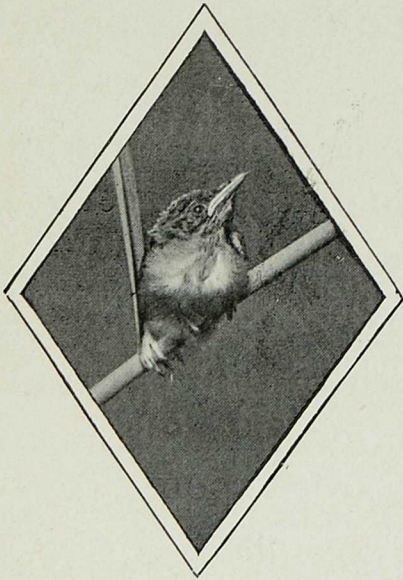
*Caterham Valley,
Surrey.*

STRANGE ADVENTURES IN DICKY-BIRD LAND.



THE CUCKOO AND THE REED WARBLER.

A STRANGE EXPERIENCE.



A YOUNG REED WARBLER.

A LITTLE mother Reed Warbler sat on her nest one warm summer's evening, awaiting the return of her mate. An old Screech Owl had just flapped lazily past, and there was hardly a sound to

be heard save the gentle lap, lapping of the far-famed Avon against its earthy

banks, or the rustling of the tall reeds as they swayed gracefully to and fro at the bidding of a tender breeze.

She had been hard at work all day long finding food for her family of four growing chicks, and thought they were fast asleep, when restless little Neddy Noisy-Notes thrust up his head and suddenly asked, "What is a parasite, mammy?"

"Why on earth do you ask such a question, Neddy?" enquired his mother, in some surprise.

"Oh, because, when you were away this afternoon, two men came along in a boat, and whilst they were examining us and praising the beauty of our home, one of them said to the other, 'Tom, I wonder what first induced the Cuckoo to become a parasite?'"

"Well," said the mother Reed Warbler, "a parasite is a creature that doesn't like housekeeping, so puts its children out to nurse and forgets to pay

the bill. For instance a Cuckoo puts her egg into your nest when you are not looking, and when the little rascal is hatched it is never happy until it has thrown every other egg or chick out and persuaded you that they are not worth looking after, and that it is the very finest and hungriest chick on earth."

"Have you ever had one in your house, mammy?" asked little Dolly Pick-them-off-the-Leaves, nervously.

"No, my dear, but when I was a chick I had a very curious meeting with one."

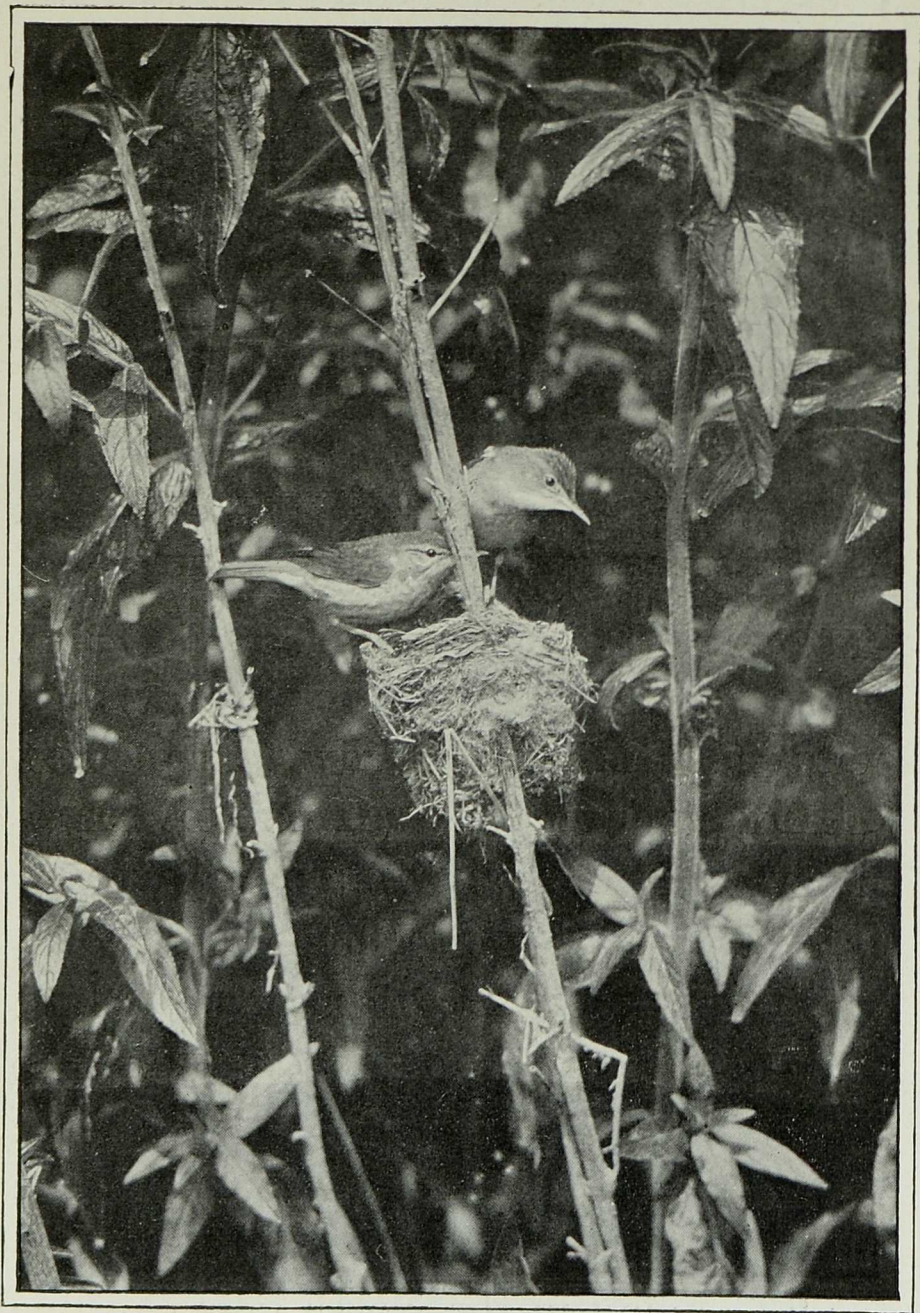
"Oh, do tell us all about it," begged all the young Reed Warblers; so the old bird related to them her experiences of a parasite.

"It was a scorching hot day in the fore part of July when I was hatched in a wee, wee nest slung between two dead willow-herb stems. My parents had built one or two very beautiful,

long, purse-like nests amongst the broad-bladed reeds that grow on the banks of the Avon, close by where the immortal Shakspeare found his wild thyme growing, but every one of them had been torn out and taken away by boys.

“I had not long been out of the shell when my troubles began.

“Three strange men stole silently and quietly up stream in a long, narrow thing they called a punt. One of them looked exceedingly happy, and kept on smiling and smiling. Another, who did not belong to that part of the country, was a man of much clothing. Although, as I have said already, the weather was hot July, he wore two flannel shirts, and other winter garments, and still boasted how cool he was. The third individual, on the contrary, had only a sort of network shirt on, looked very red, and kept on complaining of the heat—but then he was such an



“ ‘ A WEE NEST SLUNG BETWEEN TWO DEAD WILLOW-HERB STEMS. ’ ”

(p. 3.)

energetic chap, always rushing up and down the river, trying to find out with a long pole where it was deepest, while the other two sat and watched him.

“They dragged me from my nest and put me into an old fusty thing they had found in a field close by, and then rushed excitedly down stream.

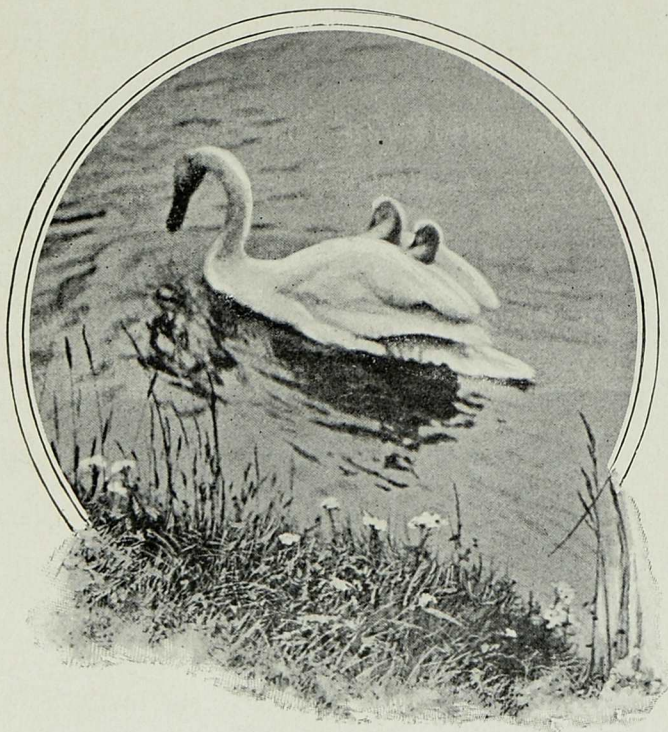
“Oh, didn’t I wish I was a young Swan when I saw two calmly riding on their great mother’s back in freedom, whilst I passed by, a prisoner, with no hope of ever seeing my father and mother again.

“When my captors got opposite a little house covered with flowers and things, they turned suddenly up a creek and plumped me down in a Sedge Warbler’s nest containing a young Cuckoo. I was never so frightened in all my life.

“The man in the North Pole clothing got under a great green rag and then

thrust a big black eye through a hole in it, so as to keep a watch on the Cuckoo and me.

“I was seated on my companion’s back, which was a nice, airy place, considering the kind of weather we were having, but he objected to my weight and wriggled about until I rolled off, when the wicked monster tried to stamp on me. It was not long before the man under the green rag



“‘CALMLY
RIDING
ON THEIR
GREAT
MOTHER’S
BACK.’”

(p. 6.)

thrust a great, brown hand through a rent and hauled me back again.

“I was extremely thankful for this timely kindness, as I did not wish to be smothered. He called the Cuckoo all sorts of names, but I afterwards discovered that he was not so kind as curious. He and his companions had brought me down in order to watch the parasite hurl me from the nest.

“By-and-by, along came little foster-mother Sedge Warbler, and I gave her something like a start. She fairly jumped when she saw me sitting on her champion’s back, and said something which it was perhaps quite as well I did not catch.

“Of course the young Cuckoo opened his mouth and begged for food, and of course I did so too, but got nothing. What chick could hope ever to be seen when a young Cuckoo opened his mouth?

“Mrs. Sedge Warbler appeared to

be uncommonly proud of her great, unwieldy foster-son, and to despise me because I was such a little one. She actually got hold of me once with the intention of casting me forth like so much dirt, but the well-clad man under the green rag did something which attracted her attention and she left me to the tender mercies of my nest companion.

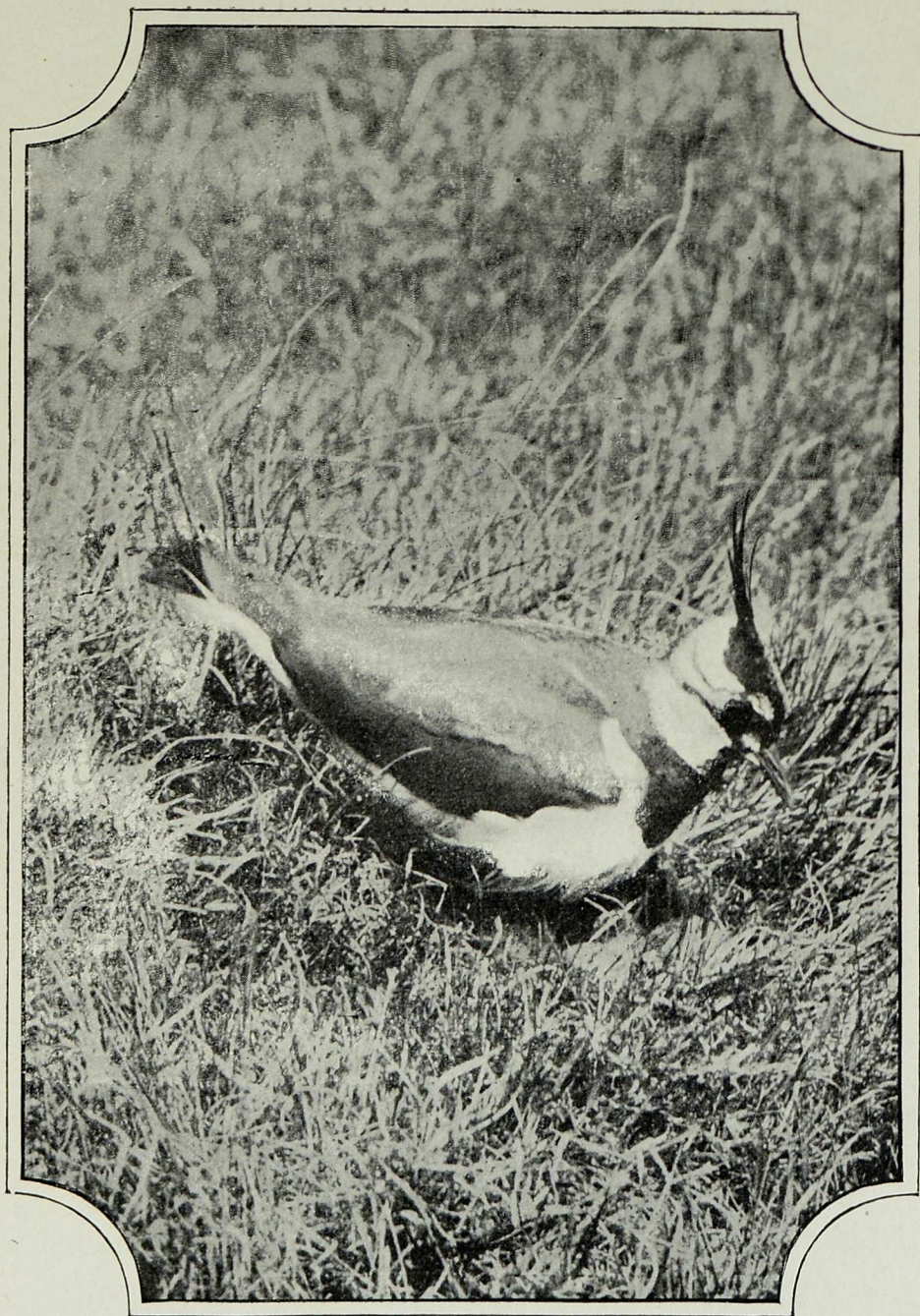
“The young Cuckoo grew very large and fat, as his foster-parents were constantly bringing tit-bits for Charlie, as they called him, and when he was fledged he was never tired of boasting that he had had his portrait taken oftener than any prince in the world of the same age.

“I ought not to grumble, however, because they kindly returned me to my nest and took my portrait directly I was able to sit on a reed, and I heard one of them say it would be put in a book.”

THE PEEWIT AND THE MUSSEL.

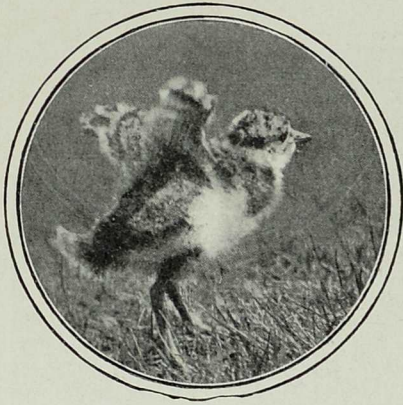
A TIGHT FIX.

THE sun was shining brightly down upon the coarse bent grass, and the Skylarks were singing far overhead just as if they believed they had stepped straight out of the cold gloom of winter into the warm splendour of summer. But the mother Peewit knew better, although the heat made her leave her nest and run to a neighbouring rill for a drink. When she came back she stood and gazed at her four beautiful eggs, and thought how nice it would be if the fine weather only lasted until her chicks came out. But it did not. In less than a week there was a great change, and the same bird sat facing a wind-lashed drizzle of cold rain with a family of fluffy youngsters beneath her.



“THE HEAT MADE HER LEAVE HER NEST.”

(p. 10.)



FLUFFY-JACKET.

The little downy things were pushing their heads upwards so vigorously in search of warmth amongst their mother's feathers, that her body could

be observed to heave under their combined exertions; and every now and then a head would slip out between her wing and body plumage in evident surprise at coming so suddenly from warmth and dryness into the cold, damp air.

Although only young, they were, like all other juvenile feathered folks, fond of stories.

"Tell us the very queerest thing that ever happened to you in all your life, mammy," said wee Dicky Fluffy-Jacket.

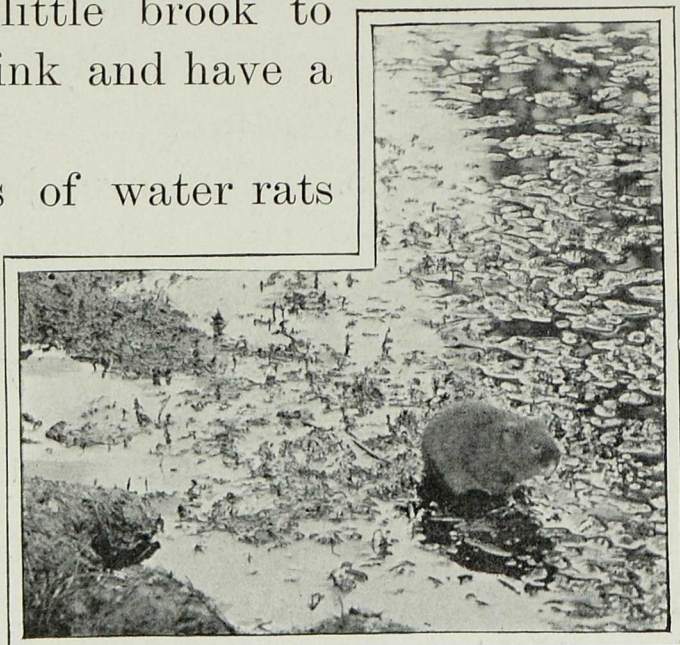
"Well, well; let me see," mused his mother; "so many strange things

happen to one during a lifetime that it is difficult to say which is the queerest. Oh! I think I know, though—the mussel trap adventure.”

“A mussel trap? A mussel trap? Whatever is that, mother?” asked the chicks in chorus.

“Well, I will tell you. It all came about in this way. I was living one dry summer on some pasture lands in Surrey, and as the weather was very hot indeed, I often used to fly to a sluggish little brook to get a drink and have a paddle.

“Lots of water rats lived in the banks of the stream, and they often startled



A WATER RAT.

me by jumping clean out of their holes and going flop into the water, or quietly popping up from nowhere in a pool close beside me.

“One day I waded knee-deep into the brook, and whilst I stood there sipping the water, and wondering when we were to have the pleasure of seeing it rain again, for food was growing very scarce, an old Jay flew along, and, alighting on the bank close to me, said :

“ ‘Hello, Mrs. P.! Having a sip?’

“ ‘Yes,’ I replied coldly. ‘This is rather thirsty weather.’

“ ‘It is so. You are just about right,’ went on the gaily-coloured bit of impudence, and then suddenly breaking off and looking intently up the stream, he exclaimed :

“ ‘My word ! Look yonder. An old Heron has just speared a poor water rat right through the head with his long bill.’

“I took a step farther out into the brook, to get a better view of what was going forth, and just as the great grey bird was gulping down the body of his victim I felt something seize me by the middle toe of the right foot. The suddenness of the attack, and the sharpness of the pain in my toe, made me cry out.

“I instantly stretched my wings with the intention of flying away, but was horrified when they both came down with a smack upon the water. I was a prisoner, but what had caught me I could not even guess. Greatly terrified, I tugged and strained with all my might, and by-and-by slightly moved the heavy object attached to my foot. You may be quite sure, children, that I struggled towards shallow water and the bank.

“My cries greatly alarmed the Jay, who flew into a tree close by, and screeched until the Heron took fright and flew away.

“‘Whatever do you think it is that has got hold of my foot, Mr. Jay?’ I cried. ‘It holds me like a vice.’

“‘I cannot tell at all,’ he replied, ‘but whatever it is you are getting it nearer the bank. Haul away, old woman, and I’ll stay by and keep you company.’

“His vulgar familiarity would have been annoying at any other time, but I was in too great a fix even to notice it, let alone resent it, so I tugged with all my might until I got the great black thing which had hold of my toe on to the bank, when the Jay exclaimed:

“‘Well, I do declare, it’s a great, hulking, fresh water mussel, Mrs. P. He’s got your toe between his shells, and shoot me on a nest if he can’t just about nip.’

“Although the Jay is a common, noisy bird, he did me a great service, I must admit, for he kindly kept me company two whole days, and warned me whenever any danger approached.

“Once he jarred out, ‘Hawk overhead!’ and I lay on my side as if I were dead, whilst the bird of prey passed over. On the morning of the second day of my captivity, by which time I had hauled my burden several yards from the stream, he spied a Fox approaching, and you will understand my great peril, dears, when I tell you that Reynard actually killed a mouse in a tuft of grass within a few yards of me without detecting my presence.

“On the third day of my bondage I felt very weak and depressed, as my foot was terribly swollen, and ached badly.

“The Jay was on the look-out as usual, and in the afternoon cried, ‘Look out! Here comes a man.’ I felt too indifferent to mind much whether it was a man or a mouse that was approaching. This, I believe, actually saved me, for a puff of wind catching my right wing, raised it, and revealed my presence to the human intruder.

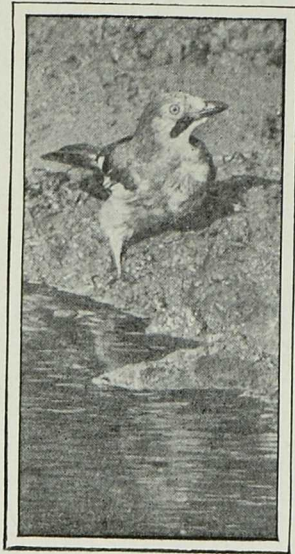
He was extremely interested in his discovery, and kept on exclaiming: 'How very extraordinary! It's a unique accident;' and so thought your mother, although she couldn't tell him so.

"He took out a note-book and pencil, and made a sketch of me and my captor as we lay together on the pasture grass. As soon as he had finished his drawing he muttered, 'Must cut it off,' and taking out his pocket-knife severed my swollen toe, and I was free. I half suspect he wanted to show the mussel with my toe between its shells to his friends, but felt thankful to escape, as a less humane man would have knocked me on the head to take away and stuff along with the mussel.

"That is how I lost the middle toe of my right foot, children, and I think you will agree with me it was rather a queer adventure."

"There is no doubt about that, mammy," said little Jacky Long-Top-pin; "but what became of your vulgar friend, Mr. Jay?"

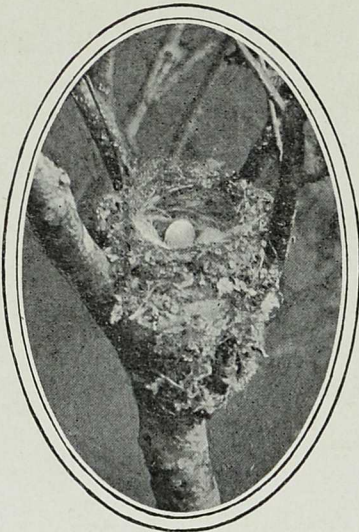
"I am sorry to say that the noisy, kind-hearted fellow got caught in a gamekeeper's trap one day, and his beautiful black and blue wing feathers were plucked out and sent away to Scotland to be made into gay artificial flies wherewith to catch salmon, whilst his poor body dangled against the tar-smeared end of an old wooden barn."



MR. JAY.

THE CHAFFINCH AND THE ADDER.

A MARVELLOUS ESCAPE.



MRS. CHAFFINCH'S NEST.

"CRACK, crack, crack !
There go those hateful
guns again. How they
do frighten me," said
the Hedge Sparrow to
the Chaffinch.

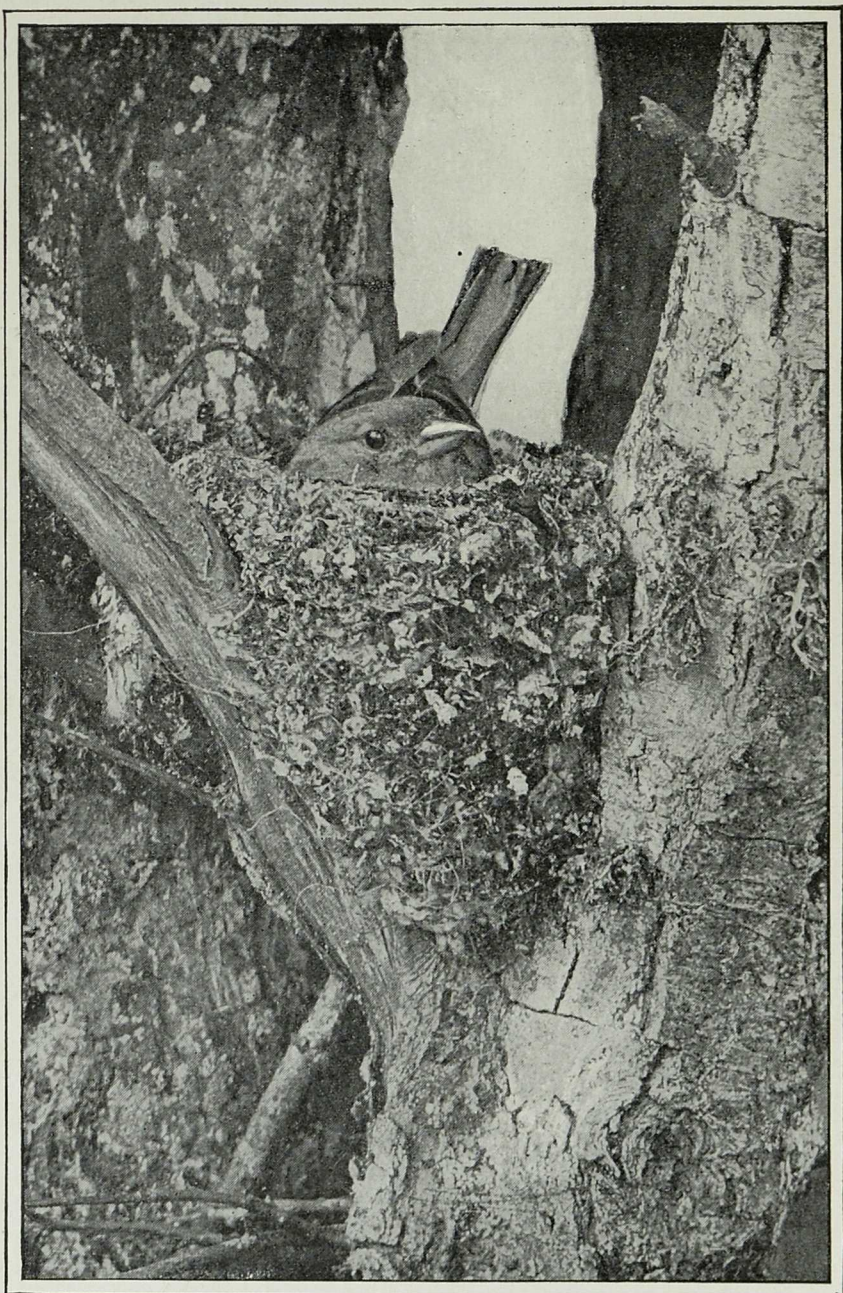
"You *are* a nerv-
ous creature," replied
her neighbour, as
she hopped off her
moss and lichen home in the fork of
a hazel and looked down upon her
little brown friend sitting on her nest
in a tangled bramble bush just below.
"Those are not shot guns, but rifles,
which are only being fired at a target,
and cannot possibly hurt us. As a
matter of fact, I like to hear them."

“Well, Mrs. Chaffinch, you are the very strangest bird I ever met; fancy liking to hear horrid guns crack, crack, cracking all day long! They make me tremble and quake until I can hardly sit on my nest.”

“I have a very good reason for liking the sound of rifles, for they once saved my life.”

This was too much for the Hedge Sparrow, and leaving her five, beautiful, turquoise blue eggs for a while, she shuffled her wings and laughingly exclaimed, “Saved your life! I suppose they didn’t go off, Mrs. Chaffinch? Whoever heard of guns saving birds’ lives? It’s really too funny!”

“It’s quite true, all the same,” replied the Chaffinch gravely. “It happened in this way. I was hatched in a nest built rather low down in a hedgerow behind the Caterham Valley rifle targets, and when the volunteers were at practice volley firing, the



“ ‘MY MOTHER SAT UPON THE NEST.’ ”

(p. 23.)

bullets used to strike flints on the bare hillside, and come screeching and whistling over our home. I shall never forget how those wandering bits of lead used to frighten me by the awful noise they made. I could hear them quite plainly, even when my mother sat upon the nest, covering me and my brothers and sisters. We used to say some horribly nasty things about the careless young Saturday night soldiers who fired them into the air, never dreaming that one of these stray bullets would at no distant date save all our lives.

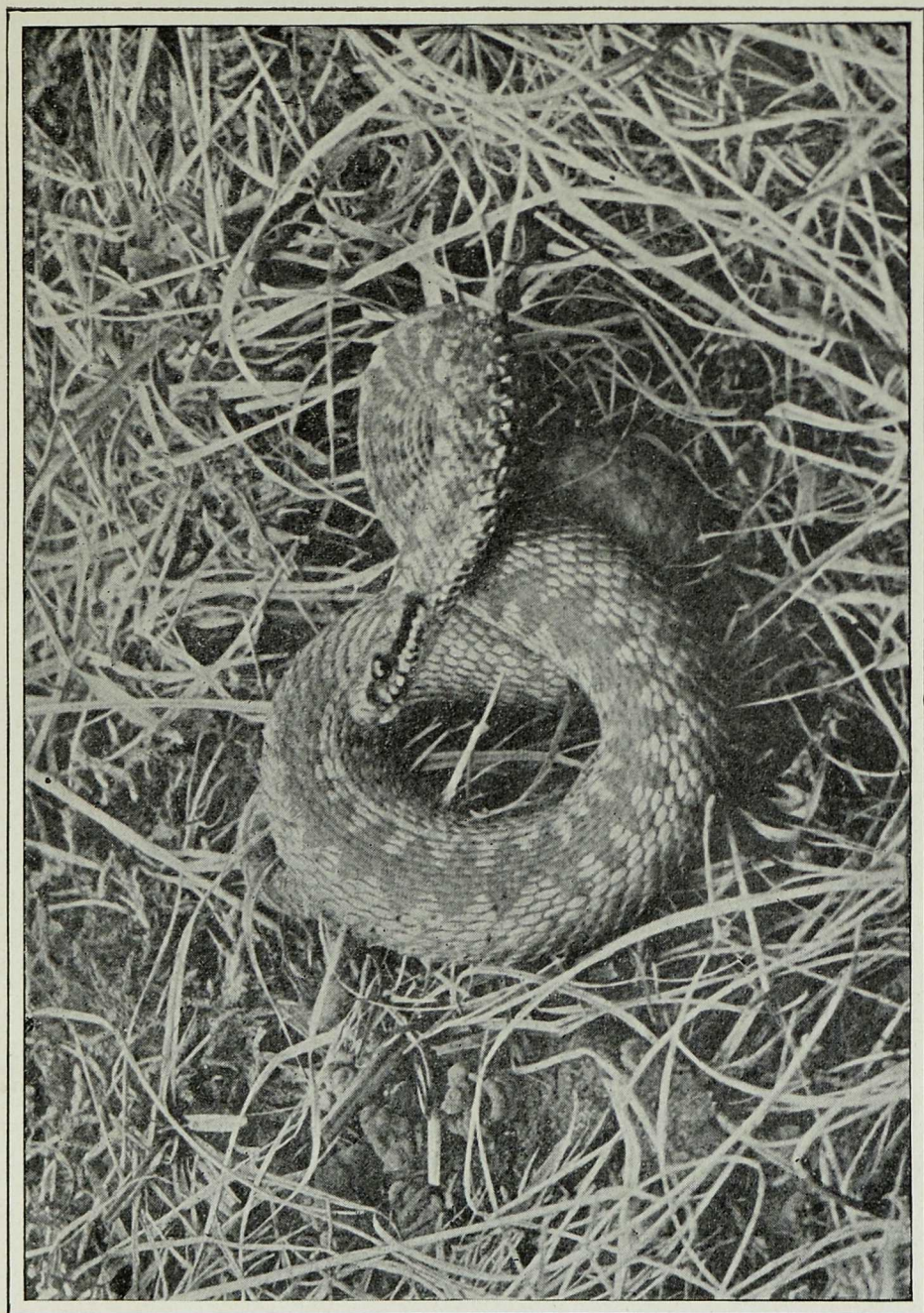
“It happened one hot Saturday afternoon in the fore part of June.

“Our parents were both hard at work bringing us food in plenty, delicious green caterpillars and other trifles equally nice and tasty, when a terrible thing happened. I had just taken the last tit-bit from my father’s bill, when he heard something rustle in the grass

below, and, looking down, gave a most agonising shriek of alarm, and fluttered out of the tree to meet my mother, who was approaching. ‘A snake, a snake, an adder, an adder!’ he shrieked at the top of his voice. Poor mother! She dropped the food she had brought, and alighting on a twig a foot or two above us, looked down at the reptile, terror-stricken.

“One of my brothers tried, brave boy, to take a peep over the side of the nest at the enemy below, but I must confess I was far too frightened to do anything save crouch as low as ever I could get, and wonder whether my little heart was really going to jump out of my mouth and leave me altogether.

“Upon seeing the condition we were in, my mother said, ‘Don’t be frightened, dears; we will beat the monster off if he attempts to climb the tree. Perhaps he won’t come up,



“ ‘ A SNAKE, A SNAKE, AN ADDER, AN ADDER ! ’ ” (p. 24.)

after all.' She tried her best—poor old mother!—to appear calm, but I could tell from the look in her eyes and the way her breast feathers puffed in and out that she was terribly scared, and my heart beat all the faster.

“Hearing the noise, a neighbouring Blackbird came along and angrily cried out ‘Spink, spink, spink!’ but although my mother begged of him to strike the murdering robber, who was by this time climbing the tree in which we lived, he contented himself with fluttering round and talking loudly of his bravery and prowess.

“Coil by coil the adder wound round the tree slowly, climbing higher and higher, and, alas, nearer and nearer to our nest and his supper. My father became frantic with rage, and dashed furiously at him, but to little purpose, for the attack only irritated the reptile, and he commenced to shoot his black-forked tongue in and out of his

mouth at lightning speed, and hiss threateningly.

“A bird’s life is largely made up of starts and fears, but I do not think anything in the whole long list of terrors can compare at all with the horror of helplessly sitting and waiting to be swallowed up by a snake. We chicks were unfortunately all too young to attempt to flutter out of the nest and escape, so just had to huddle together in abject terror, and await the savage jaws of the enemy.

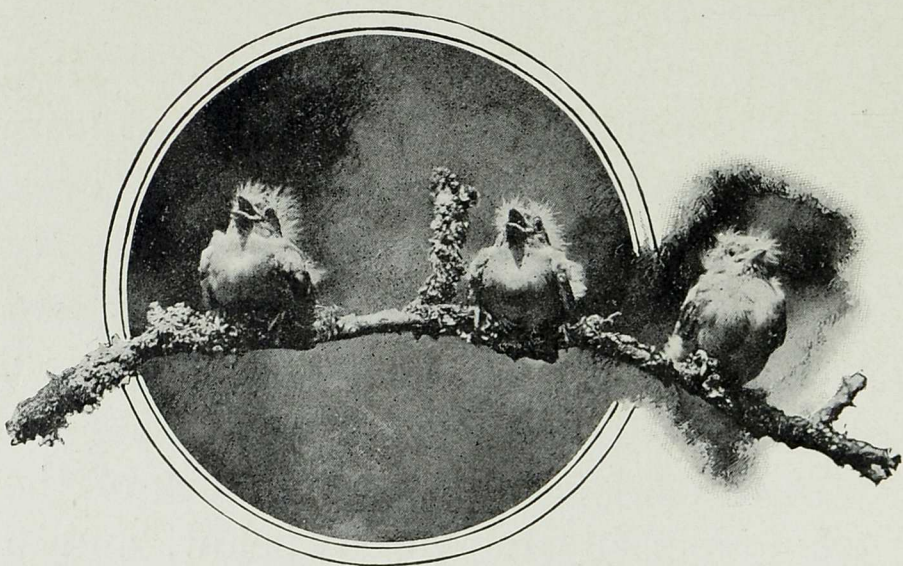
“By-and-by he reared his terrible head above the nest, and with a gleam of satisfaction in his wicked eyes, opened his mouth to seize me. My mother gave a shriek of despair, and just as he was in the act of striking, a marvellous thing happened.

“*Bang, bang!* went the rifles of the volunteers in the valley below, and a bullet came twirling and screeching up the hillside. It crashed into the hedge-

row, cut a long, white lane in the bark of an ash-tree, turned sideways, cut the adder's head clean off, and tore away into Birchwood beyond.

“There was some rejoicing in Chaffinch Land that evening, I can tell you. We young birds sat on branches and talked about our marvellous deliverance for days after.

“That is why I like to hear the crack of a rifle.”



“ ‘WE YOUNG BIRDS SAT ON BRANCHES.’ ”

THE HUNGRY TAWNY OWL AND THE ANGRY MOTHER RABBIT.

“TU-WHIT, tu-whoo!”

“Oh, there’s your father at last, children,” said the mother Owl to her three downy young ones, as she peeped cautiously out of an old hollow beech tree in Downham Churchyard. “He is late to-night. I wonder what he has brought us.”

She answered her mate, and away he came through the still, moonlit air, as silent as a shadow. His flight was rather slow, but then he carried a heavy burden in his strong, hooked talons. He alighted on a bough which ran down close to the hole in the tree, and his wife exclaimed :

“My word ! That is a beauty, Billy ; wherever did you catch it ?”

“What is it, mother ? What have

you brought, father? Let me see," cried all the young Owls in a breath.

The strongest chick of the three, named after his father, Billy Snatch-'em-Unawares, tried to scramble up the inside of the hollow tree to where his mother sat in the entrance hole, but slipped on the smooth, hard wood and fell head over heels to the bottom, where he lay, panting, upside down on the top of his brother and sister, who were very cross, snapping their bills and scolding him roundly for his clumsiness.

The father Owl admired his eldest son Billy very much, and sat and laughed, as fathers will, over his little misadventure, until the prey he had brought fell to the ground, and he had to go after it.

"Now, children," he cried, "stop that quarrelling, and let me see how you are getting on with your lessons in fieldcraft.

"I have brought you a queer creature to-night. Its ears are longer than its tail, and when it goes for a walk it puts its hind feet down in front of its fore ones."

"You are trying to be funny to-night, dad, I reckon. Just say that again, will you?" piped cheeky Billy.

"Mother has never told us a word about such a strange animal," cried Sally Sit-in-the-Barn.

"I'm no good at riddles, father," squeaked tiny little Bobby Blink-in-the-Sun.

"You are just a lot of downy dunces," replied their father. "Talk about Owls being birds of wisdom! why, only the other night I was telling you all about rabbits and their odd ways."

"Oh, it's a rabbit, is it?" cried the young Owls together. "Let us see it."

The old Owl flung the little bunny over his wife's head, and it slipped down the hollow tree and fell limply

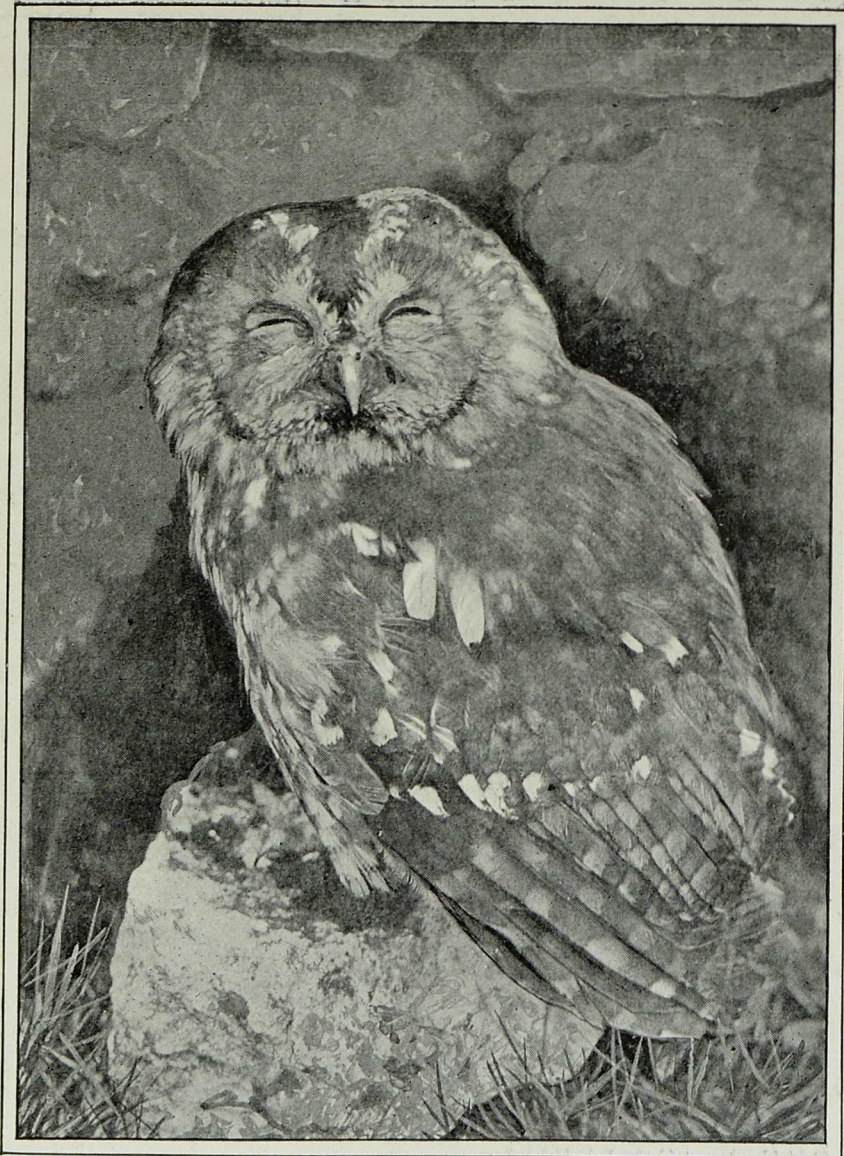
on the backs of the three Owlets sitting huddled together amongst the feathers of many victims.

It was a great curiosity, and the young birds turned it over and over and examined it very carefully before their mother commenced to divide it amongst them.

As soon as Billy the younger had had a taste, he shouted to his father, "It's real good, dad; fetch us another as soon as ever you can catch one. I'm just longing madly for my first coat of feathers, so that I can go out one night and watch you tackle big game."

"It was a jolly supper, daddy. Quite a change from silly young Pee-wits and lean mice that are all down and bones," cried little Bobby, and then commenced to snore.

"I feel sorry for the poor wretch," remarked Sally meekly. "Hadn't he a father or a mother to take care of him?"



“ ‘SITTING IN THE SHADE OF AN OLD STONE WALL.’ ”

(p. 34.)

“Yes, of course he had,” replied her father; “but they had four other troublesome youngsters to look after, and the one you have just eaten was such a wilful, conceited chap, he thought he could teach his mother how to nibble grass. She told him not to stray too far away from his burrow, but he just laughed, and, calling her ‘a nervous old thing,’ scampered away round a boulder of rock, and began to kick up his heels and leap over dandelions to show how clever he was.

“He never saw me sitting in the shade of an old stone wall; and, swooping swiftly and silently down the hillside, I had Master Jack and was off with him before he could scream out ‘Mother!’”

“Deserved to be eaten for his disobedience and conceit,” jerked out Bobby peevishly.

“Waked up again, have you, my son?” said his father, who did not

care much for the wee one's spiteful disposition.

Sally looked thoughtful for a while, and then glancing up towards the entrance hole where her male parent was sitting preening himself, she asked:

"But I suppose old rabbits do protect their young ones, daddy?"

"Mostly by showing them the quickest way home underground. However, some of them occasionally go beyond stamping and thumping, and do give battle with a vengeance.

"Did I never tell you about the attack one made upon me last year?"

"No, never!" replied Sally and Bobby together.

"Well, then, I'll tell you all about it."

This promise was too much for young Billy, and he made another desperate effort to get up the hollow tree, and succeeded. Taking his seat on a dead branch near by, and look-



“TAKING HIS SEAT ON A DEAD BRANCH NEAR BY.”
(p. 35.)

ing very proud over what he had accomplished, he said :

“That’s right, dad, tell us a story. I do like your yarns. I haven’t forgotten your exciting experience with that big trout yet. Let me see ; how far was it he dragged you under water ? Edinburgh to the Isle of Man ?”

“You’re a cheeky young rascal, Billy, and the first time I take you out hunting I’ll give you a ducking.”

“Don’t, dad ; my mother isn’t a quack-quack, and I can’t swim a bit.”

“Stop trying to be funny, Billy, and let father tell us all about his adventure with the old mother rabbit,” demanded the other Owlets impatiently from below.

The old Owl puffed out his feathers, shook himself, and began :

“I was flying quietly alongside a hedgerow one dull evening, when I espied a nearly half-grown bunny sitting beside a burrow washing himself. Food was very scarce that spring, so I determined to try my luck by having a clutch at him, and putting on speed I stooped. Just as I struck, the sharp little chap ducked his head and bounded forward, and I only caught him lightly by the loins with my right foot. He struggled and screamed with might and main, and before I could better my hold upon him I saw stars !”

“Whatever happened?” asked the Owlets all at once.

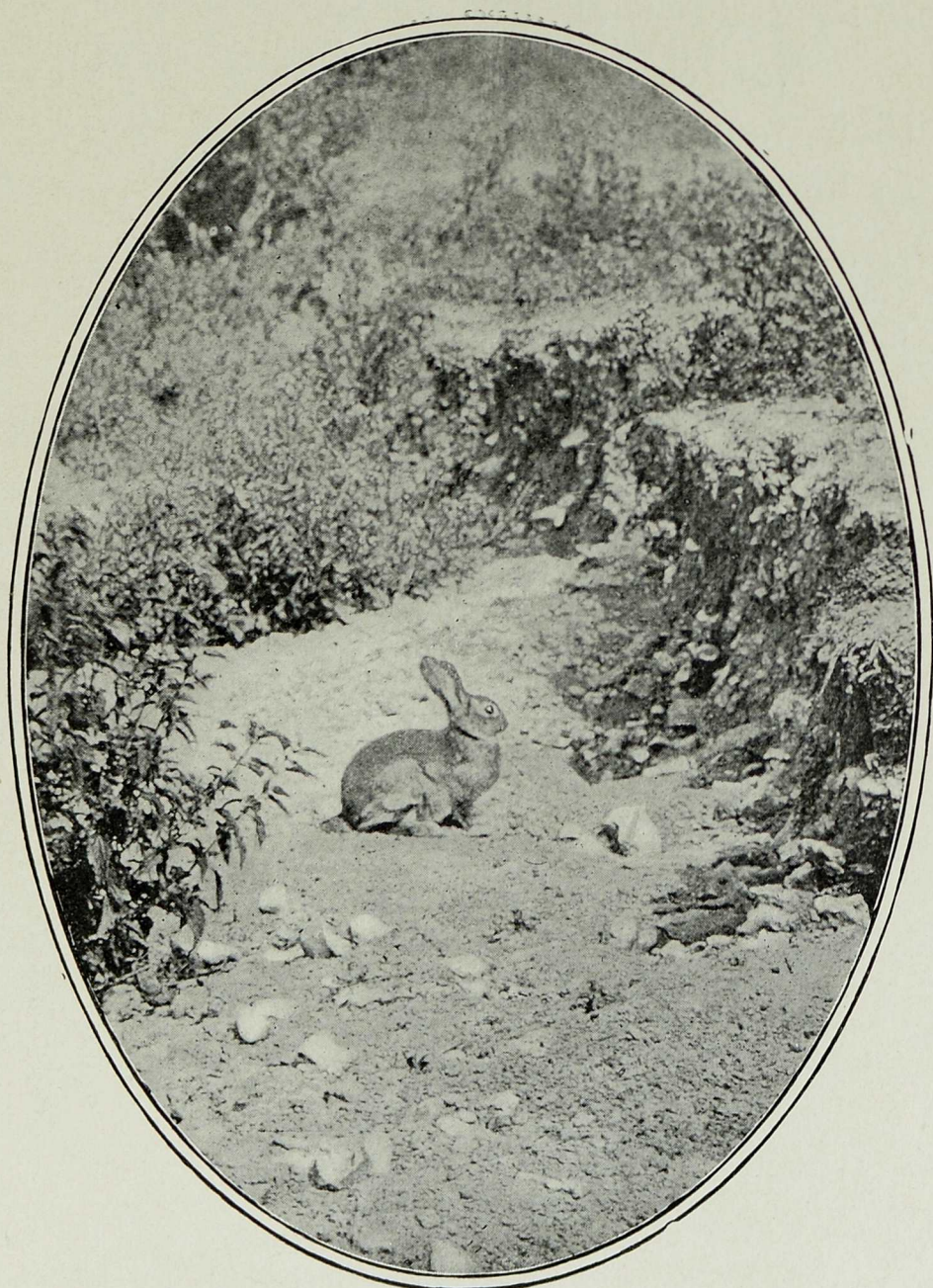
“His mother bounded out of her burrow like a wild cat, and, seizing me by the wing, struck me such a blow in the ribs with her great hind feet as nearly knocked the breath out of me. We all rolled over and over in a confused bundle, and my feathers flew about like thistledown on a windy day.

“Of course, I lost my hold upon the young rabbit, and threw myself upon my back, as all the members of our family do to defend themselves; but there was no need; the brave old rabbit and her son had disappeared underground.”

“Good old Bunny! She was too many for you that time, dad,” said Billy junior, chuckling to himself.

“But didn’t you lie in wait for the little wretch another evening, father?” enquired revengeful Robert.

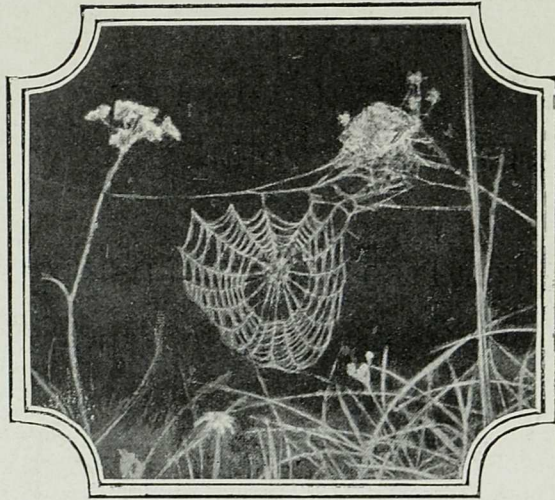
“No, boy; Owls worth their claws never bear malice.”



THE MOTHER BUNNY.
(p. 38.)

“That’s right ; I’m glad to hear that, daddy,” chimed in Sally.

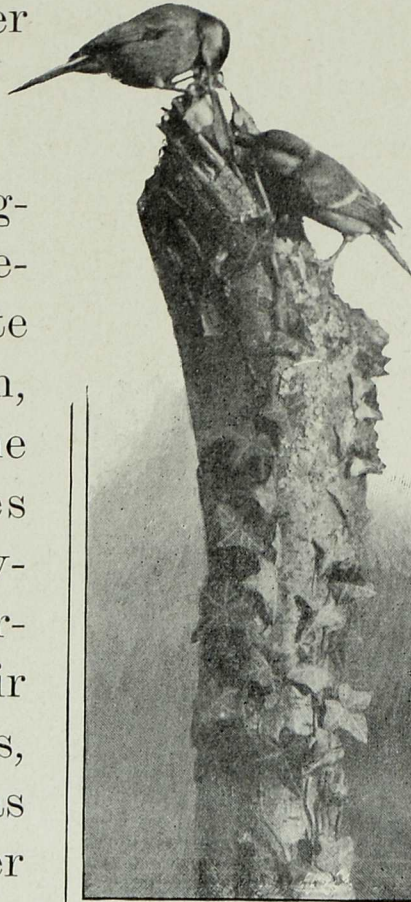
“Nor care to risk the loss of all their feathers either,” whispered Billy to his parent with a wink.



THE BRAVE OXEYE AND THE HUNGRY CAT.

“Now just sit still, my little chickadees, for five minutes on this oak twig, and I will tell you a tale,” said a mother Oxeye to her family of nine little fledglings.

“It was spring-time, and the hedges were milk-white with may-bloom, which filled all the fields and lanes along the countryside with sweet perfume, when a pair of mother Oxeyes, or Great Tits as some people prefer to call the members of our family, met



“‘THIS SEEMS A LOVELY
PLACE.’” (p. 42.)

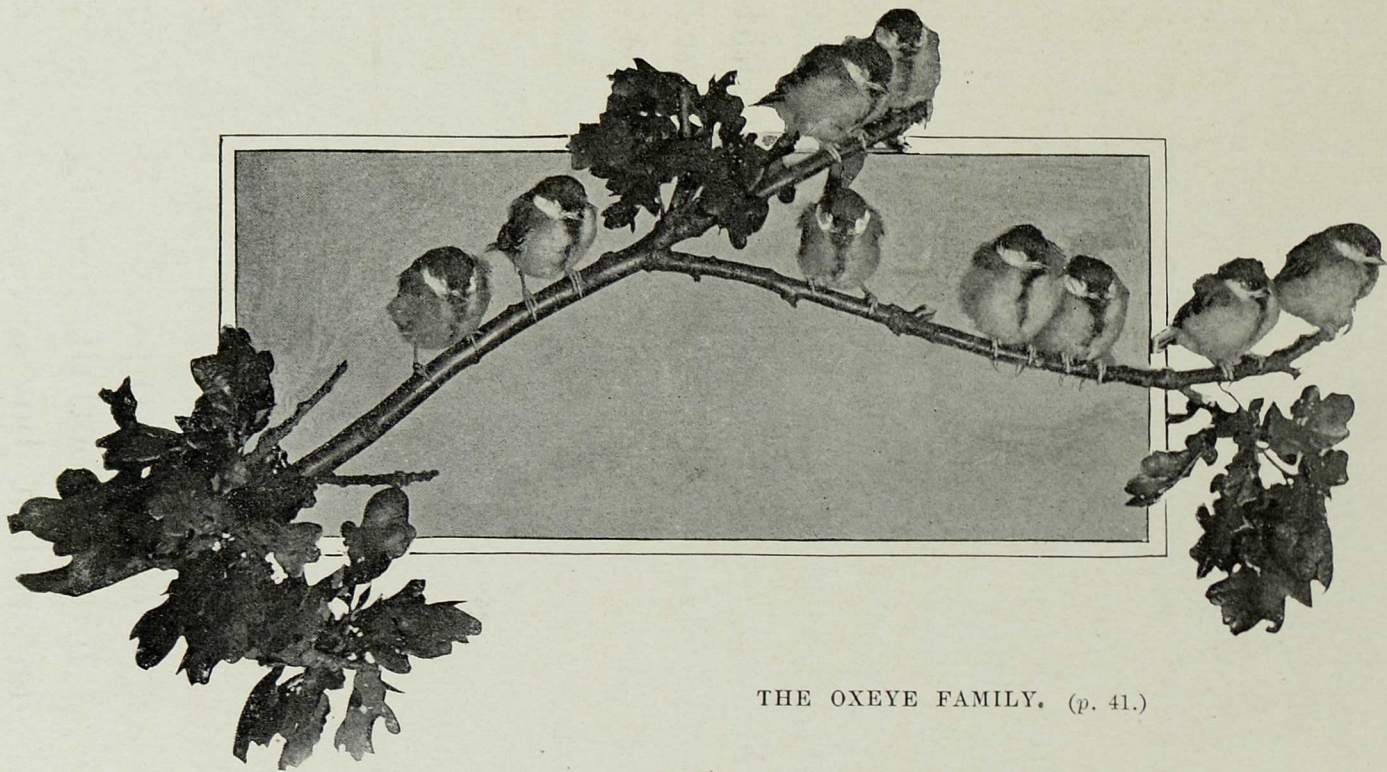
in an old orchard and began to talk about nest-making.

“ ‘This seems a lovely place to rear a family in,’ said Mrs. Cheadlechee, looking round amongst the hollow old apple-trees.

“ ‘Perhaps,’ replied her friend Mrs. Pinkerpee; ‘but take my advice and never build a nest close to a house, or you are sure to be troubled either by prowling cats or by mischievous boys. I once reared a family in this very orchard, and shall never forget the frights and worries I had. You see that old apple-tree near the white wicket-gate?’

“ ‘Yes,’ replied her friend; ‘the one with the great crack running down within a foot or two of the ground end of the trunk.’

“ ‘Precisely! Well, one spring I peeped inside that crack and saw a Starling sitting on a nest containing five beautiful blue eggs. I took a



THE OXEYE FAMILY. (p. 41.)

fancy to that hole, and made up my mind to occupy it quite early next year; but when I called again the place was almost filled with straws, bits of string, and feathers, and I knew from its untidy appearance that some slovenly old Sparrow had taken possession of the place.

“The following spring I happened to pass that way, and seeing a spider’s web—which is the usual bird-notice of a house to let—over the hole, I said to myself, “Ho! ho! What’s this? Haunted?” and took a peep inside. I thought it rather strange that neither the Starling nor the Sparrow had come back, but I built a nest, laid my eggs, and very soon discovered why.

“I was sitting dozing off to sleep one warm afternoon, and wondering if there could be a bird in the whole countryside as happy as I, when I heard human footfalls on the ground outside, and a boy’s voice cried out,

“Hi, Bill, this is the tree I got the Starling’s eggs out of,” and a very dirty hand instantly shot down the hole towards me. I pecked it very vigorously, and at the same time hissed with all my might.

“The lad promptly withdrew his hand, and yelled out, “A snake! A snake, Bill! It’s bitten me! It’s bitten me!” I chuckled to myself with delight; but my joy soon turned to fear, for the other boy suggested procuring a stick and “prodding the beggar to death in his hole.” They were evidently cutting a stick and preparing to carry out this idea when, luckily for me, along came the farmer and roared over the hedge, “What are you young rascals doing in my orchard? Here, Snap! Shift ’em! Shift ’em, lad!”

“The old dog commenced to bark furiously, and the boys to yell in terror as they tore through the hedgerow and away down Ivy Lane as hard as ever

their youthful legs could carry them. The old farmer scraped the mud off his boots and went indoors, laughing heartily, and I sat and chuckled with delight over my delivery from danger.

“ ‘But again my pleasure and peace were short lived. Farmer Brown kept a great, well-fed tom cat, which was not half so innocent as he looked. This brute had a habit of sneaking round the orchard on tip-toe in the evening-time after young rabbits, and by some ill fortune discovered my whereabouts.

“ ‘The very first warning I had of danger was one day when an awful paw came through the hole in the old apple tree and commenced to feel from side to side for me. I pecked at it and hissed furiously ; but it would have been much better if I had sat quite still, for what will frighten an ignorant little boy will only provoke a cat, and the monster tried harder and harder

to hook me by the back in his cruel claws, and actually succeeded in pulling out some of my feathers.

“‘I crouched as low down as ever I could in my nest, and oh, how I wished the hole had been an inch or two deeper!

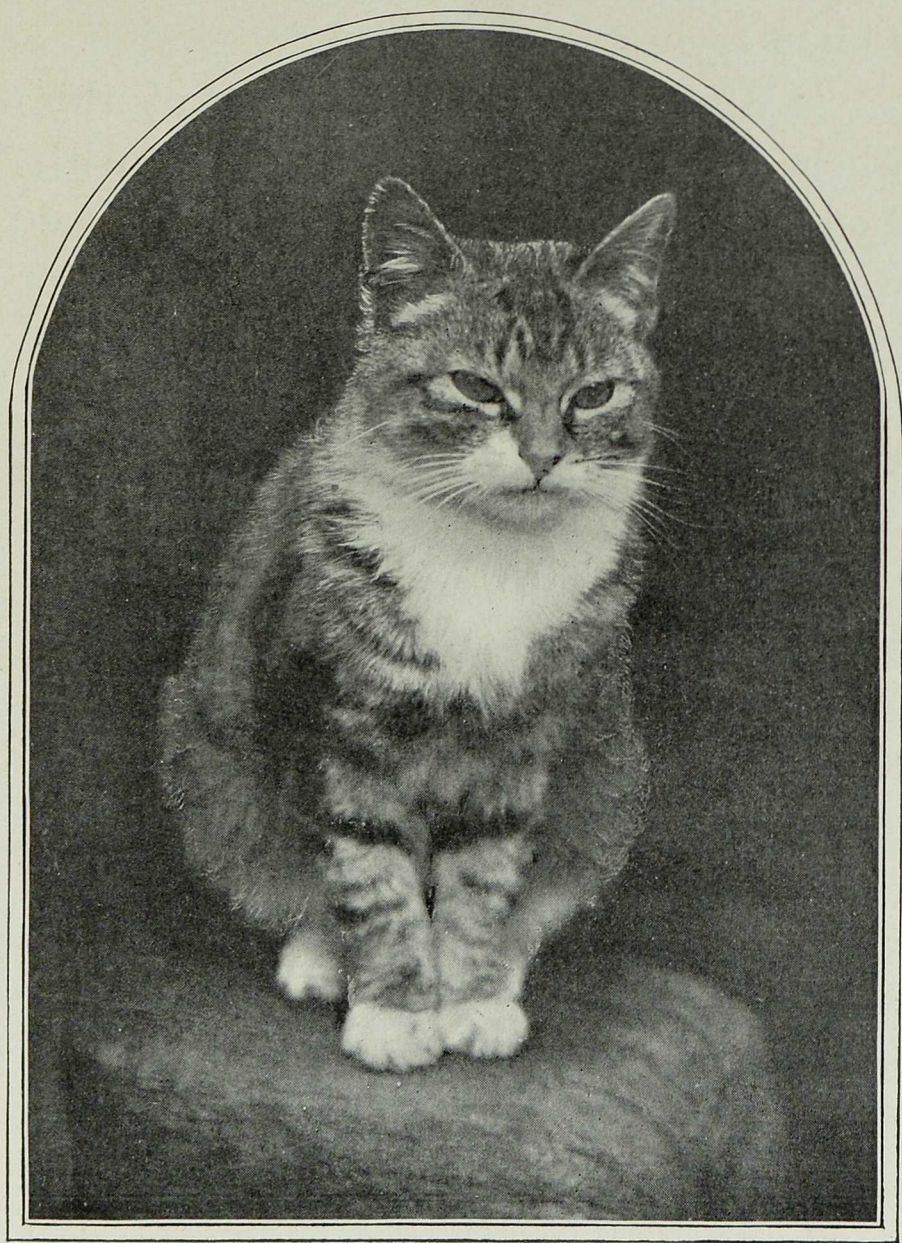
“‘I was just trembling with fright, as I made quite sure my end had come, when at the very height of my terror I heard a man cry, “*Scaat oot!*” and a stone struck the old apple-tree smartly.

“‘The cat withdrew his paw in a hurry. This time I had been saved by a North-country naturalist. I could tell he came from the North, because in his excitement he said “oot” for “out.” He was a queer chap, for, upon peeping inside my hole and seeing me, he remarked, “I thought so,” and, snatching his cap from his head, thrust it in, and, leaving me a prisoner in total darkness, dashed off down Ivy Lane as hard as he could run.

““ In about half an hour he returned with a table knife and a long, narrow-necked bottle. With the former he dug a neat pit at the foot of the apple tree, and in this he buried the latter right up to the level of its neck, and then drew the cork.

““ As soon as ever he had finished his work he went down upon his hands and knees and took a sniff at the bottle. This made him screw up his face in the oddest fashion, and he began to cry like anything.

““ He took out his pocket handkerchief, and wiping his face, muttered as he walked away, “That will make Master Puss jump, I know, when he comes to enquire what it all means ;” and then, suddenly becoming aware of the fact that he had forgotten his cap in the entrance hole to my nest, ran back and withdrew it, at the same time exclaiming tenderly, as he peeped down at me, “Poor bird! I nearly



“A GREAT, WELL-FED TOM CAT.”
(p. 46.)

smothered you to death by accident whilst trying to save you by design."

"My mate told me a lot of this when he ventured to visit me with food. I asked him to keep a good watch on Farmer Brown's cat, and to give me timely warning if he approached, so that I might escape, as I was very much afraid of being clawed off my nest by him. During my mate's third visit with food he cried out to me in a great state of alarm to sit still, as our enemy was so close that he would catch me before I could get away if I attempted to escape.

"Your father and I both wondered very much why the naturalist had placed the uncorked bottle in the ground, but we soon found out. The cat crept up stealthily, sniffing from side to side as he advanced. The newly turned earth evidently attracted his attention, and he took an enquiring sniff at it—just one, and jumped sky-

high. He commenced to sneeze as if he had swallowed a snuff-box, and flew across the orchard towards home for dear life. The naturalist had filled the bottle with strong ammonia, and Farmer Brown's cat had had a great surprise.

“‘I reared a family in that old hollow apple-tree, but afterwards agreed with the Starling and the Sparrow that nesting sites within reach of small boys and cats are dangerous.’”

THE ARTFUL MOLE AND THE INNOCENT BLACKBIRD.

“TELL us about the most wonderful escape you ever had from an enemy, will you, daddy?” said an excitement-loving little Blackbird, sitting alongside one of his brothers on a twig overhanging a cattle pond.

“Oh, let me see, let me see,” mused the sable old bird with the orange bill. “I think the most curious adventure I ever had, and certainly the narrowest escape, happened to me when I was a young fellow, just learning to sing.

“Blackbirds are all early risers, and I used to leave my cosy roosting perch under a tuft of ivy at the first peep of day regularly every morning, in order to listen to my father, who was a

capital singer, and such a cunning old bird, too !

“ One day he said to me, ‘ Jack, do you know an easy way to catch worms ? ’

“ ‘ No, father, ’ I answered.

“ ‘ Well, I’ll tell you, then, lad. If ever you see a mole at work throw-
ing up a



“ SITTING ALONGSIDE ONE OF HIS
BROTHERS.” (p. 52.)

hillock of earth, just hop quietly along to the place, and ninety-nine fat caterpillars to a lean daddy longlegs you’ll observe a terrified worm or two hurrying to the surface of the ground

in order to escape from their enemy below. Once they have left their holes you can pick them up and swallow



THE MOLE.

t h e m a s easily as ever you please, for it's what men call a case of "out of the frying pan into the fire" so far as the worms a r e c o n - c e r n e d.'

" 'Thank you very much indeed.

That is a pretty wrinkle, and no mistake, dad,' said I with glee.

" 'Yes, Jack,' replied my father, 'but it's just like all pretty things—it needs to be approached with care, as the puppy dog said when he tried to

play with the wasp. You must be very careful the mole does not catch hold of you, for he is an awful cannibal, and the monster that will eat his own grandmother would not hesitate to breakfast off you.'

"Being dragged underground alive and devoured in a mole's dark tunnel struck me at the time as being rather an unpleasant way of ending one's career; but warnings have a trick of slipping from the minds of over-confident young people, and I had forgotten the dangerous side of my father's information in less than a week.

"I was standing on the topmost branch of a dead tree early one morning, listening intently to my worthy parent's top notes, when I observed a tiny clod of earth roll off the top of a newly made mole hill. Now's my chance, thought I, never dreaming of the great surprise in store

for me. Keeping my eye steadily fixed on the spot, I saw the mole give another heave, and out came a great red worm, helter-skelter. I was on him like a shot, and thought I had never in all my life tasted such a delicious morsel.

“I waited about for some time, feeling sure that other worms would come to the surface ; but in vain, the mole had ceased to work.

“By-and-by, a monster just showed his great pink head on the crown of the newly-made hillock, and I grew so excited I could hardly stand still.

“I waited and waited, and as the mole did not burrow any more the worm also waited and waited. I naturally supposed that as there was no enemy at work beneath him he did not see the fun of coming out to make a meal for me, so I decided to pounce upon him and drag as much of his body out as I could.



DADDY BLACKBIRD.

“I made a wild dash at him, and never got such a fright in all my life.”

“Whatever happened, daddy?” asked both the young Blackbirds excitedly.

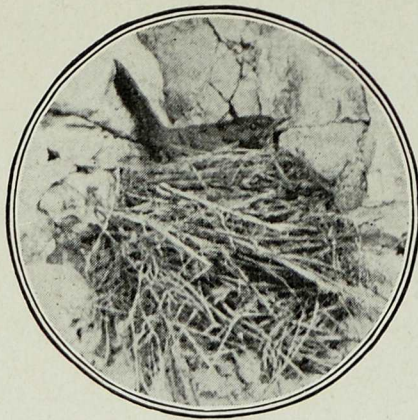
“Well, what I supposed to be the head of a worm proved to be the snout of the artful old mole. Whether he had stuck it out in order to get a breath of fresh air, or as a deliberate bait for me, will never be known ; but directly I seized it he seized me, and it is a wonder I’m alive to tell the tale.

“The brute instantly tried to drag me underground, but being a strong young bird and my bill hard and slippery he lost his hold, and I made my wings go faster than they ever flapped before or since.

“It was a full week before I dared look at a worm again.

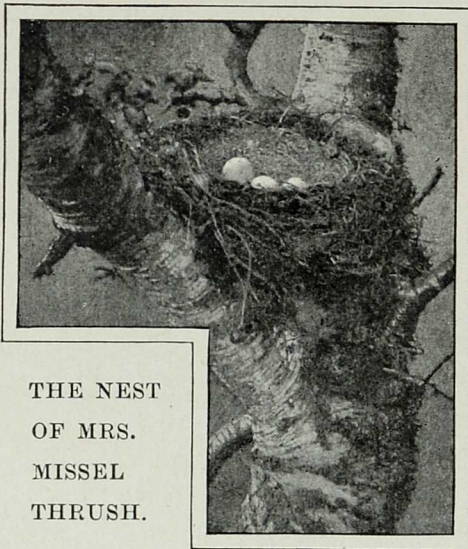
“Take my advice, children, and

examine early worms well, especially when they thrust their heads out of mole hills. Man-made proverbs need applying with caution, and I should tie on behind 'It is the early bird that catches the worm,' but 'All is not gold that glitters.' "



BLACKBIRD ON NEST.

THE ANGRY MISSEL THRUSH AND THE STARING SCREECH OWL.



THE NEST
OF MRS.
MISSEL
THRUSH.

FOUR young Missel Thrushes sat in their nest, built in the fork of an old moss-clad birch tree, and enjoyed a lovely see-saw as the leaf-laden boughs swung

to and fro in a strong breeze.

Peeping over the edge of the nest, little Molly Make-Believe, who was the youngest chick of the family, said :

“Why, it’s snowing !”

The other birds all craned their necks at once to look below, and it certainly did appear to be doing so.

But Billy Born-Wise couldn't for the life of him make out why white flakes should be flying below their home and not above it, until his sister burst out laughing at him, and said :

“Why, you great goose ! Whoever heard of it snowing at Midsummer ? We are a second brood, and your snowflakes are merely petals of May blossom being driven out of yonder hawthorn by the strong wind.”

“Oh, yes ; oh, yes ; so they are. How very odd,” said the wise one, and the other birds all laughed until their old home, which was growing very squat and out of shape with their combined weight and rough usage, shook again.

Hearty Jack thought it was a good thing their father and mother had taken the precaution to fasten their nest to the bark of the tree in which they lived by means of a lock or two of wool ; else, between their boisterous

ways and the wind, it would have tumbled out, and they would have been lying on the ground with their necks broken long ago.

“That was a funny story mother told us the other night,” said Richard Raspy-Voice to Jack.

“It was so!” replied his brother, and they all commenced to laugh again over it until they were obliged to rest their heads on the edge of the nest.

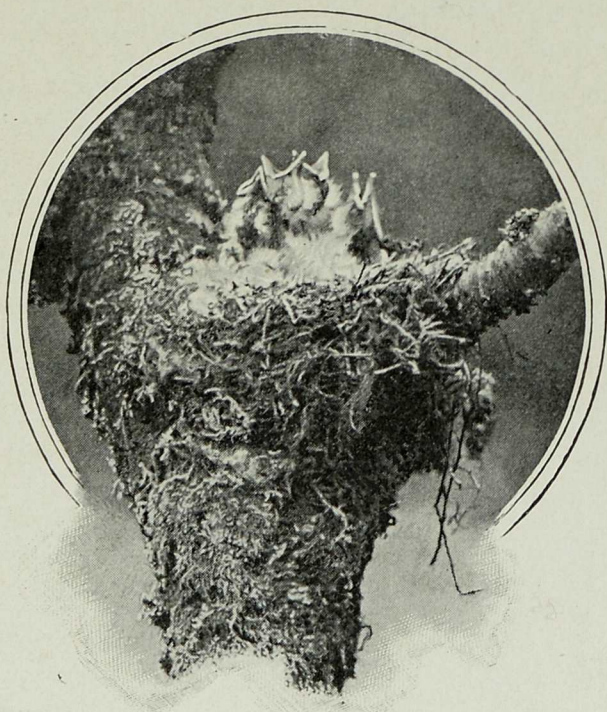
“We must get her to tell it over again when she returns,” suggested Molly. “It will give her poor old wings a rest.”

In a little while the mother Missel Thrush came back with a nice fat grub in her bill, and, holding it over the open mouths of her children, who were all crying in one voice, “Me first, mammy; me first, please,” she told them it was for the one who could name the politest bird in their neighbourhood.

Each chick guessed in vain until it came to little Billy's turn, when he meekly answered :

“ A Peewit, mammy.”

“ Capital, Billy ! capital ! You have



“ ALL CRYING . . . ‘ ME FIRST, PLEASE ! ’ ”

(p. 62.)

justified your name this time, although your brothers and sister all make fun of you and laugh at your innocence. Now tell us why, my son.”

“Because she is always bowing to everything and everybody.”

The reward was fairly won, and Billy looked wonderfully pleased with himself as he swallowed the dainty morsel an observing eye had won for him.

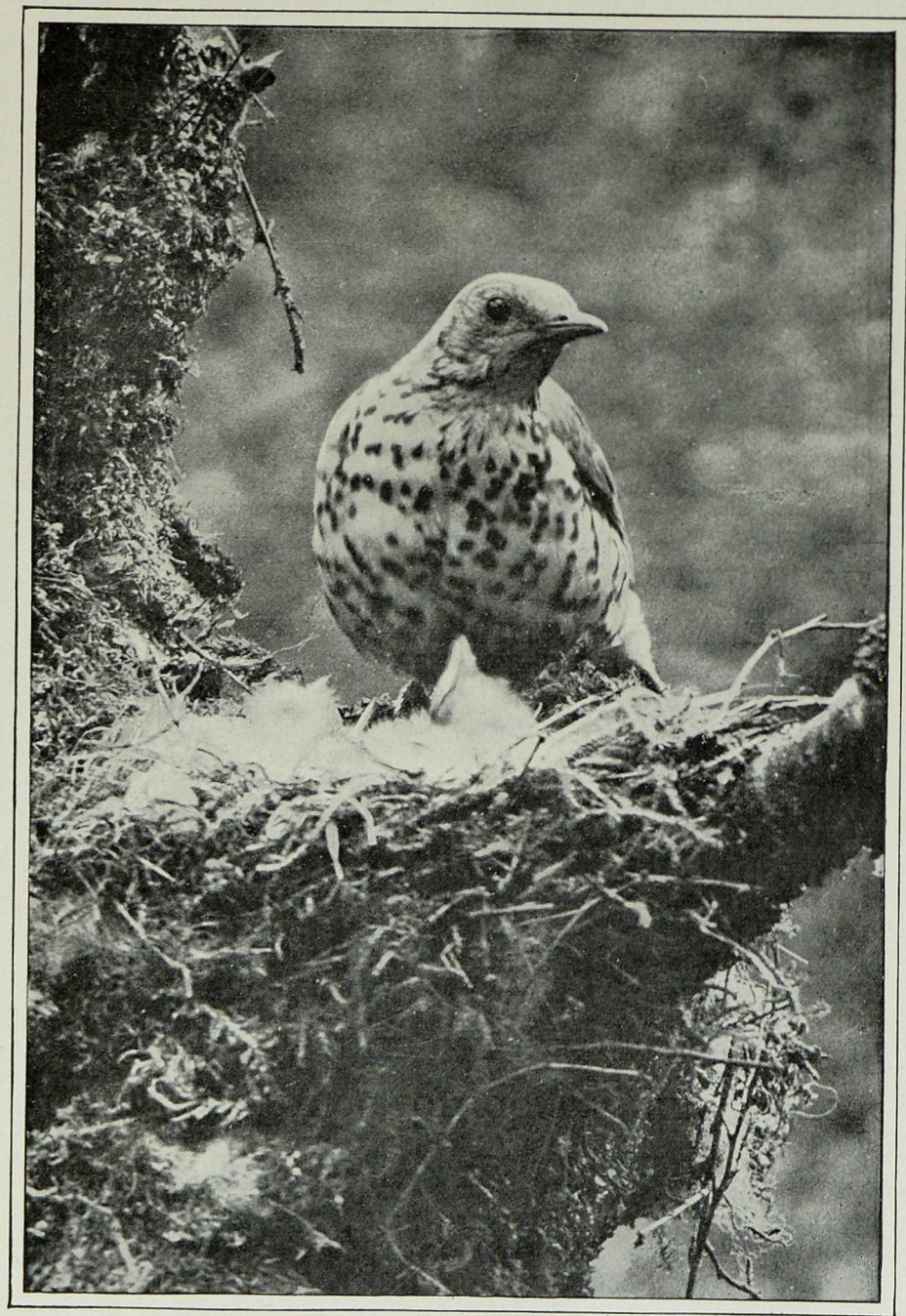
“Sit down and tell us the Owl tale again, mammy,” pleaded Jack.

“Do you like it, my son?” enquired his mother.

“I do, mammy,” replied the young Missel Thrush.

Sitting down on her flattened-out nest, with her children’s heads sticking out all round her, the old bird commenced to relate the Screech Owl story.

“When I was a chick, dwelling in a nest just like this, a man one day climbed the tree to look at my brothers and sister; and when he had gone, and we began to look round us again, we were terrified to observe a great,



MRS. MISSEL THRUSH.

savage-looking Owl sitting on a bough not three feet away, glaring fiercely at us. We were all very much frightened, and instantly crouched down and started trembling.

“Presently, along came our mother with a billful of food, but, upon catching sight of the intruder, she instantly dropped it and began to scream murder at the top of her voice. This brought father upon the scene in less time than it takes to tell the tale, and together they dashed wildly in and out of the tree, round and round. They were simply frantic with rage and fear, and their screams brought Black-birds, Chaffinches, Swallows, Robins, and Wrens upon the scene, and the din made by the combined clamour of voices, all shouting that it would be best to do this, that, or the other, was truly awful.

“Our neighbours all had some dreadful experience to relate about

Owls devouring chicks, and nasty things to say to the rogue on the branch ; but he just stood and stared, and never said a word.

“ ‘ Dash at him ! Go for him, Mr. Missel Thrush ! You’re the biggest bird here, and they’re your chicks he’s going to swallow,’ shouted first one bird and then another.

“ These remarks were uttered rather tauntingly, and so annoyed my father that he decided to attack the enemy, even if he lost his life through it. So, whispering something to your granny, he flew to a branch above the Owl and a few yards to his right, and prepared to strike the rascal.

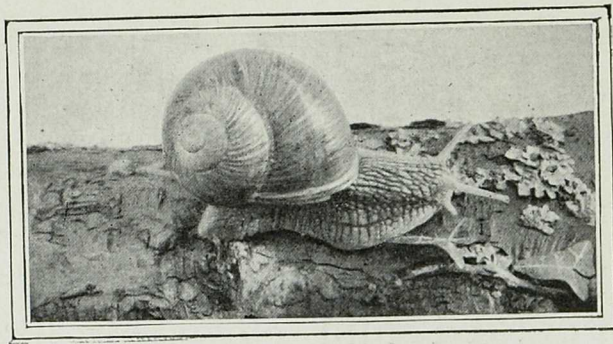
“ With a beating heart he made a tremendous rush at the monster, and, striking him a heavy blow behind the head, knocked him clean off his feet, and he fell headlong to the ground and lay there quite still.

“ ‘ Bravo, bravo !’ cried all our neigh-

bours from a safe distance. ‘You’ve killed him; you’ve killed him,’ they shouted, observing that the Owl never stirred a feather.

“By-and-by the whole copse was filled with tittering, and little Johnny Wren started whistling, ‘Who killed the stuffed Owl?’

“Everybody laughed heartily, and then the man who had climbed the tree came along, laughing too, and took away the STUFFED OWL.”



THE PARSON, THE RAT, AND THE HEDGE SPARROW.

A GREAT PERIL AND A WONDERFUL RESCUE.

A LITTLE brown mother Hedge Sparrow sat on her nest in a tuft of Indian grass, and listened fondly to her mate's jovial song as he flirted his wings and hopped in and out of the well clipped hedge running round the Rectory lawn.

One of her chicks, young Jack Rattle-Cap by name, popped his head from beneath her sheltering wing, and, after listening intently for a few seconds, said: "My stars! but isn't daddy a champion singer, mammy?"

Before his parent could answer him, however, his sharp little eye caught sight of a strange brown animal, with a long tail, bobbing about under the hedge, and he enquired in a whisper,



“A LITTLE BROWN HEDGE SPARROW SAT ON HER NEST.”

(p. 69.)

“What is that queer creature on the hedgebank?”

“It’s a rat, Jack,” muttered the old Hedge Sparrow under her breath; “keep quite still, and do not utter another sound.”

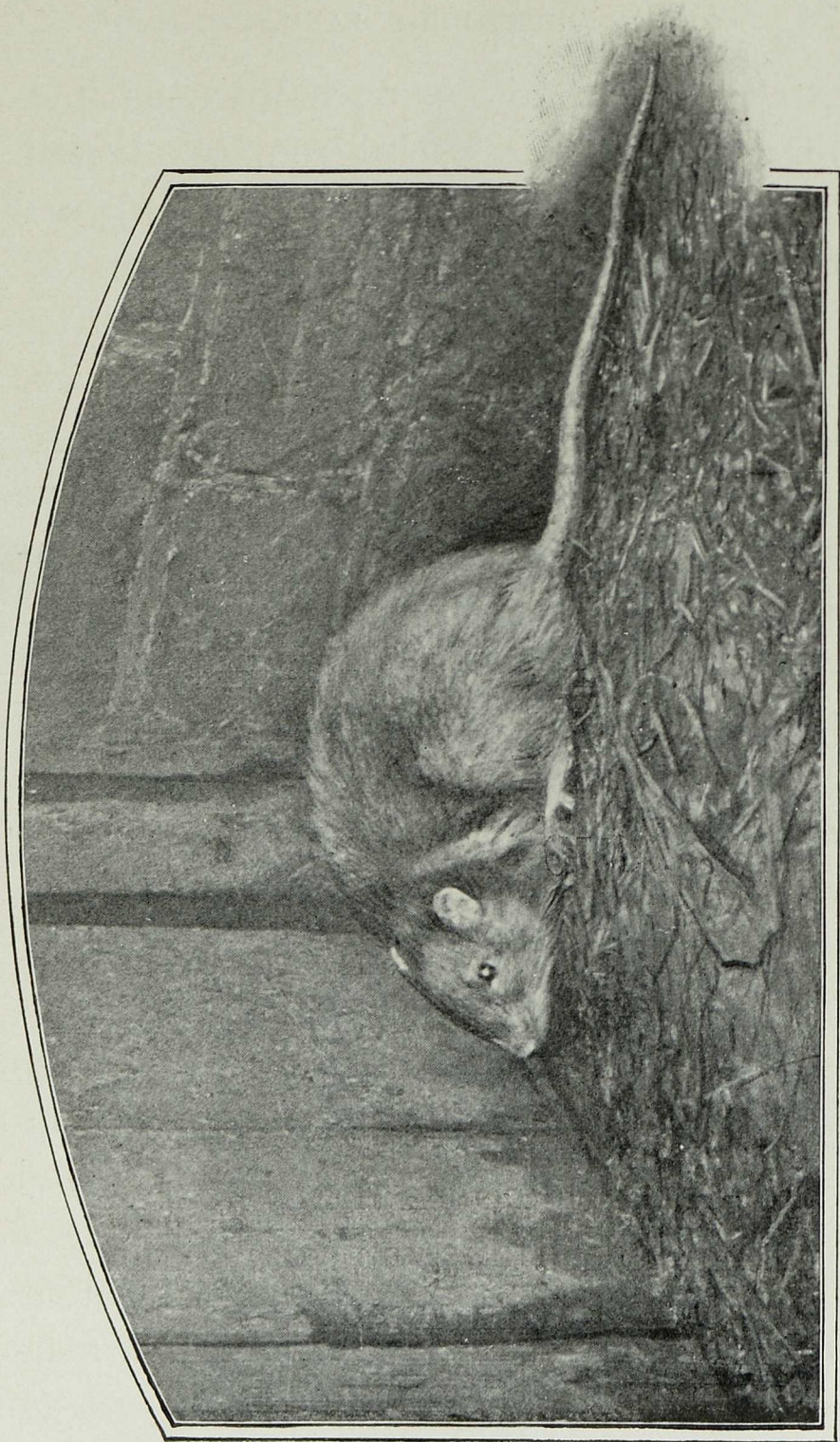
The young bird could plainly see that the ugly monster was hunting about for something to eat. This important observation, coupled with the fact that the marauder’s mere presence had started his mother trembling violently, forced poor little Jack to the unwelcome conclusion that he might form an acceptable part of the rat’s supper. A great fear came over him, and in spite of what he had been told about keeping silence he disobediently whispered in a faltering voice, “Is there any danger, mammy?”

The old bird made no reply, so her son hustled nervously down beneath her, and when he had reached the very bottom of the nest rather unkindly told

his brothers and sisters to make haste and say their prayers, as they were all going to be gobbled up inside of ten minutes by a great, hungry rat.

Dismay quickly spread through the whole family, but, to the great relief of everybody, help soon came from an unexpected quarter. A stray dog happened to be passing along the road, and sniffing the hedgerow dividing it from the Rectory grounds scented the rat. With a rattle and a crackle he came bounding through, and very nearly caught everybody's enemy, who had forgotten that his retreat hole at the foot of the stable door had been repaired.

Whether the rat left the neighbourhood after this or not will never be known, but it is certain he gave no further trouble to the Hedge Sparrows, and when the young ones were on the point of being fledged, their mother told them why she was so very nervous at the time of his visit.



“ ‘ THERE WAS A RAT.’ ”

(p. 74.)

“This is not a once-upon-a-time-long-long-ago story, children,” she began, “but something that really happened to your father and myself last spring.

“We had built our nest in the same tuft of Indian grass with which we were both, and as a matter of fact still are, greatly in love, and had a family of five strong, promising chicks just like yourselves in it. One Saturday evening, I was sitting at home keeping a good watch upon whatever was going on around me, when your father hurried up with the alarming news that there was a rat hunting in the hedgerow close by, and asked me to keep the children quiet.

“I had no difficulty in doing that, but in spite of all my care the rat discovered us. Possibly the wind betrayed our presence, as it was blowing straight from us towards our enemy, the motions of whose nose showed that he was asking questions.

“Nearer and nearer he came, until with an evil look of satisfaction in his beady eyes he left the hedgerow and bounded into the tuft of Indian grass.

“I sat quite still, thinking that he might not discover us after all, but the hope was an utterly vain one. He rustled about for a few seconds on the ground below, and then made a vigorous upward spring. The great blades of grass proved rather treacherous, and twisting and bending in all directions let him slip, and he fell back with a bump to the ground and rolled right over.

“Your father was flying round and round in the greatest distress, and a male Blackbird came and began to scold the intruder in his loud, clear, *spink spink* note.

“The robber took no heed of this, however, and I was soon startled to feel him right under the nest. ‘He is working his way through the bottom,’

thought I, 'and going to drag my children from beneath me'; so I jumped up to see what I could do to help to drive him away.

"No sooner had I fluttered off than he climbed on to the top of the nest and seized my first hatched chick, little Bobby Flirty-Wing, by the neck. Whether he desired to show his children how to kill fledglings, or something alarmed him before he had time to despatch Bobby, I cannot say, but he immediately jumped down and made off with him.

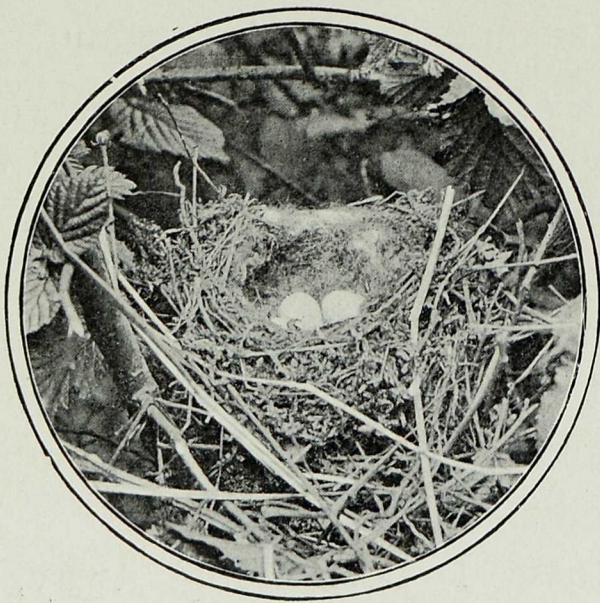
"I was simply heart-broken, and my cries of distress brought all the birds in the neighbourhood to see what was happening. They did not stay long, however, for there was a tremendous *bang*, and the rat rolled over dead on the lawn between the Indian grass tuft and the hedgerow, with my child in his mouth.

"The parson was at work in his

study, and, hearing our Blackbird neighbour sounding the alarm, got down his gun just in time to see the robber making off with my son.

“Strange to say, Bobby had been hurt neither by the rat’s teeth nor by a single pellet of the discharge, and our benefactor kindly put him back into the nest again.

“That is why I love a Blackbird for a neighbour, and a sportsman parson’s grounds to breed in, children.”



HEDGE SPARROW'S NEST.

THE TITLARK AND THE MERLIN.

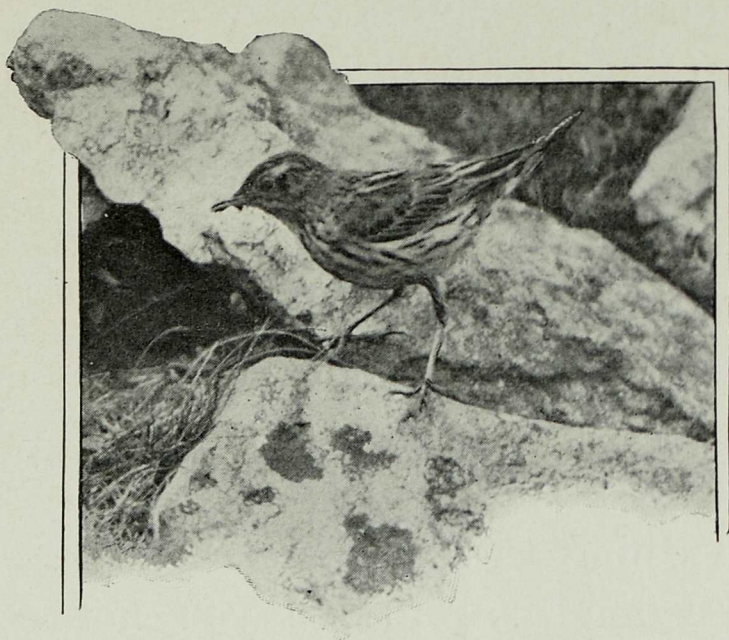
A TALE THAT SUGGESTED ANOTHER TALE.

“TRIT, trit, trit,” said an old mother Titlark as she approached her nest, which was cunningly hidden in a hole amongst a number of half-buried stones forming part of a wilderness of grey limestone rocks on the Westmoreland fells.

“Welcome, mother! welcome! Come along, do ; we are all so hungry,” cried four or five little birds in tender, chickish voices ; and the winged visitor promptly entered her dim abode. She parted her rather small catch of winged insects amongst her children, and, looking around somewhat uneasily, enquired :

“Have I been long away, then, dearies?”

“You have, mother,” they all agreed, “and we have not seen father for ever such a while. The last time he came



“AS SHE APPROACHED HER NEST.”

(p. 78.)

a big bird chased him right in here, and he panted so hard for breath that he could not speak a word to any of us. He brought no food, and stayed until a lame shepherd came by and frightened the great bullying bird with the hooked beak away.”

“Trit, trit, trity-trit.”

“Oh, here is your father, children,” exclaimed the old mother Titlark joyfully, recognising the voice outside. “I am glad !”

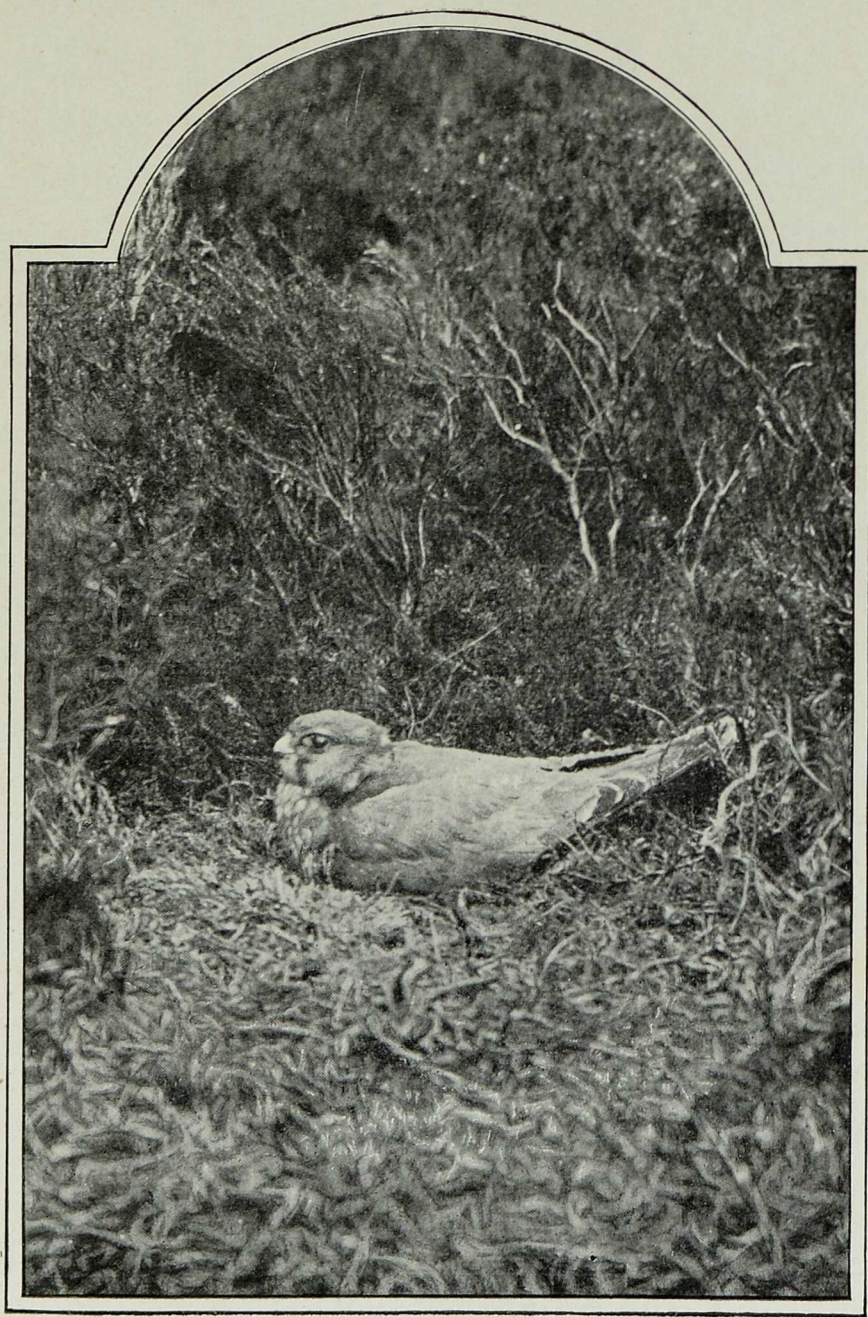
“Come inside, father, and let us hear where you have been, and all about the big bird that chased you home.”

The male entered with quite a good catch of beetles and flies, for which his hungry sons and daughters clamoured loudly, and swallowed gratefully when he shared them out.

Turning to his wife he said :

“I am glad to see you here safe and sound, my dear. It’s exceedingly awkward that the Merlin family should have turned up in this neighbourhood again. Do you know old Mr. Make-the-Feathers-Fly very nearly turned you into a widow this morning, my little matey? Did you see anything of him?”

“I very much regret to say I did, and also of his wife. Whilst flying over that patch of deep heather growing on



“ ‘MRS. MERLIN . . . SITTING ON A NEST.’ ”

(p. 82.)

the top of Birket Knowe I was startled to see Mrs. Merlin, or Make-the-Feathers-Fly, as you have nicknamed the family, sitting on a nest. You may be quite sure I did not dally round such a dangerous place for long; but on my way home had the ill-luck to fall in with her wicked-looking husband, who also came very, very near to making a widower of your wife's husband, my dear.

“It was a long chase and a stern chase, and, had it not been for the fortunate presence of Bessimoor barn, would have ended very differently. Directly I became aware of the pursuing Hawk's presence I put on speed and flew as hard as ever my wings would carry me, but to small purpose. He gained upon me until I could distinctly hear the rip, rip of his pinions cleaving the air behind. I twisted and doubled over walls and round rocks; but, do what I would, I could not baffle

my persistent enemy, and, worst of all, breath and strength were gradually leaving me. Just as I was on the point of giving up all hope of ever seeing you and the chicks again, Bessimoor barn came in sight, and, rushing through a poacher's peep-hole in the wall, I made a last desperate effort to save my life. Luckily, the door was standing ajar, and, with the roar of the Merlin's wings in my ears and a heart throbbing wildly with the expectation of instant seizure, I dashed through, flew to the other side of the barn, struck the wall, and fell senseless and exhausted to the ground.

“When I recovered and peeped out, I beheld Mr. Make-the-Feathers-Fly sitting on a wall in front of the barn door, calmly waiting for me, so I quietly slipped out of a hole in the wall at the back, and, keeping out of sight under a stone fence, escaped and came away home with what food I

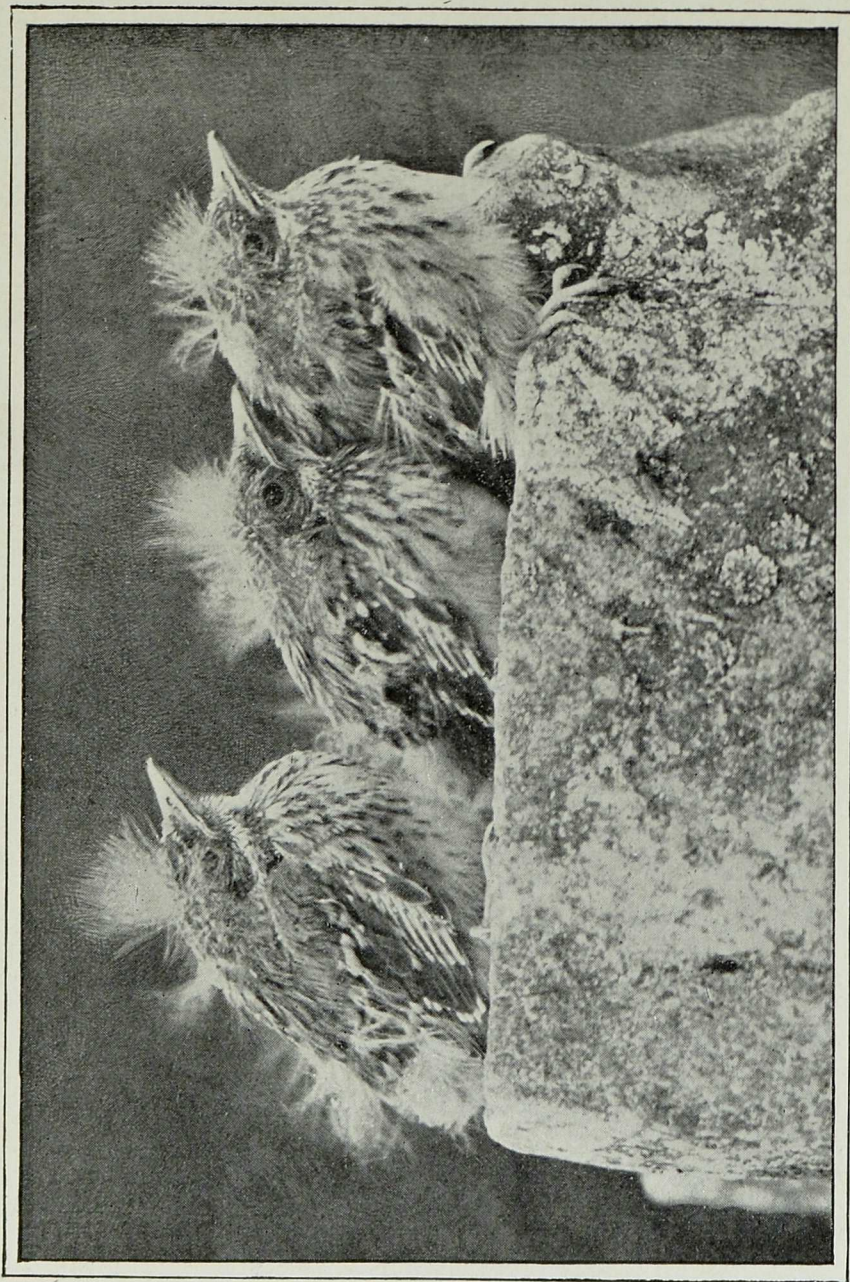
could manage to pick up on the road."

"Capital!" exclaimed the male Titlark. "We must be very careful not to go in that direction for food any more, and to get these hungry children as far from this neighbourhood as possible directly they are fledged."

The chicks were so deeply interested in the tale of adventure they had just heard that their mother said to her husband :

"You must tell the children all about your wonderful adventure with the Sparrow Hawk and the express train, father. It beats my story hollow, and, besides, it got published in all the London papers," she added proudly.

When the young Titlarks were fledged, their parents gave them a hard day's travelling, so as to get as far away from the Merlin country as possible, and in the evening the father bird got the three males on to a stone



"ALL IN A ROW."
(p. 86.)

all in a row, and the mother bird her two daughters on to another some distance away, and the tale of the Sparrow Hawk and the express train was told them as a reward for their obedience and industry during a very trying day's travel.

The old male Titlark began :

“One fine autumn afternoon I was sunning myself on an embankment of the North-Western Railway, which, as your mother will tell you, runs Shap Fell way, when an express train came rattling along, with great wreaths of white steam curling over her side and floating away for a little distance across the bare fields beyond. I had seen the same sight hundreds of times before, having been hatched on the side of an embankment, and would have taken no notice of it but for the fact that I observed a large dark bird flying alongside the train when a gust of wind twirled the little fleecy clouds of steam aside for a moment.

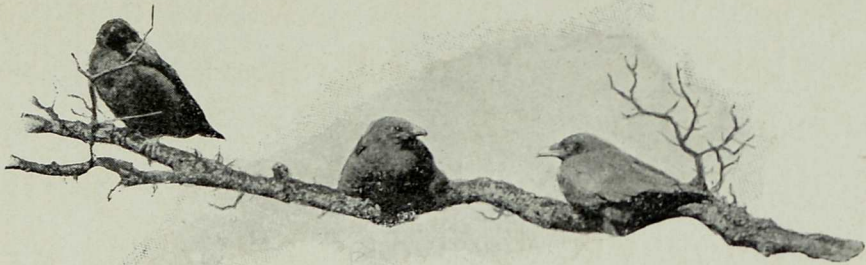
“It was a Sparrow Hawk artfully trying to steal a march upon small birds he knew the rushing train was likely to flush.

“Of course, I ought to have sat still and allowed him to pass, instead of rushing hopelessly for the cover of a thick hedgerow dividing two fields beyond the railway. My enemy was too quick for me, and, heading me off, there was nothing for it but either to be caught on the spot or to make a wild, aimless dash right back into the white clouds of steam. I followed the latter course, with the Hawk so close upon my heels that I heard the tip of one of his wings brush the side of a railway carriage.

“It came into my head that I might baffle him by slipping through the multitude of telegraph wires, which were, luckily, on the steamy side of the train. So I tried the experiment, and how he managed to avoid becoming

entangled or knocking his head off remains a mystery to me to this very day.

“I was growing weak, and my pursuer angry at being cheated of his prey so often. He was chasing me hard, and, as every other chance of escape had gone, I dashed straight through a half-opened carriage window and took refuge on the hat-rack. Whether the Sparrow Hawk could not stop his flight, or entered the compartment in sheer determination to kill me, will never be known, but it is certain that he did so, and, getting his hooked claws entangled in the network of the hat-rack, became a hopeless prisoner, and was slain with an umbrella by a passenger, who afterwards caught me under a seat and very kindly let me go.”



THE YOUNG CROWS.

THE BRAVE RINGDOVE AND THE MURDERING CROW.

“Coo—coo—coo—hoo!” said the mother Ring Dove to her pair of fat, downy chicks, as she sat and covered them with her great strong wings. “I wonder when this cold weather will come to an end.”

“Yes, it does whistle up through this old platform of sticks, mother,” said one of her children, sadly. “Why on earth don’t you line it with moss, or something else that would keep the cold wind away?”

“Ah, my child! you are young yet,

and, like all young people, have a great deal to learn about the world and its strange ways. If Ring Doves were to build great, warm, substantial nests, they would be discovered all the sooner, and robbed much oftener even than they are."

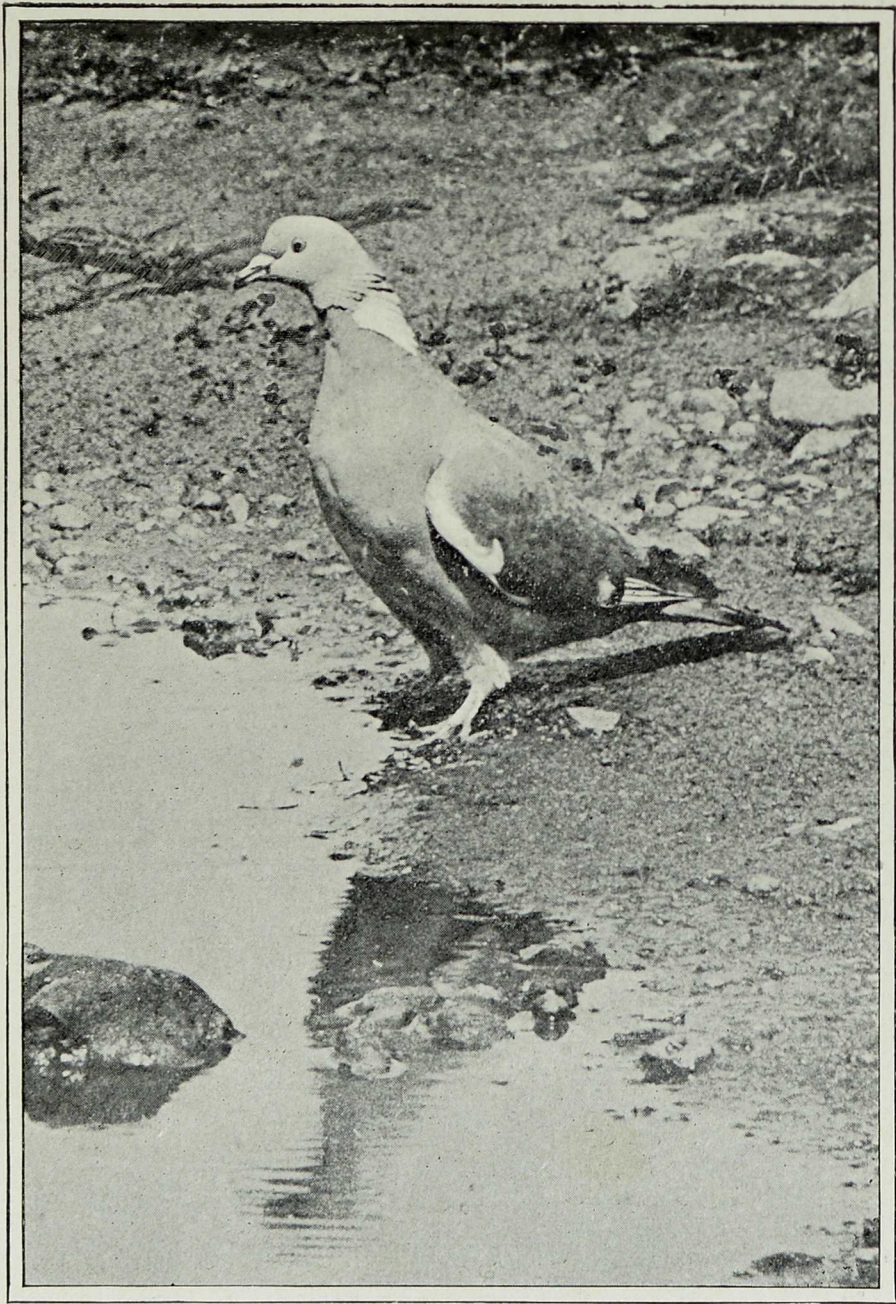
"Ah! I never thought of that. Have you ever had a nest robbed, mother?" enquired little Cushie Doo.

"Yes, only last spring, in this very wood."

"Who did it?"

"Mrs. Carrion Crow and her fierce old husband. They espied my pair of beautiful white eggs through the overhanging branches blowing aside one windy day whilst I happened to be away getting a drink, and very speedily carried them off and swallowed their contents."

The younger of the two chicks, just awakening from a nap in time to hear the last part of this conversation, began



"I HAPPENED TO BE AWAY GETTING A DRINK,"

(p. 90.)

to tremble violently, and nervously asked, "But do Carrion Crows ever devour young Ring Doves, mother?"

The old bird could tell by the tone of her child's voice, and the way his body shook under her, that he was genuinely frightened, so tried to avoid making a direct answer to the question, as mothers sometimes will, in order not to upset their children, so replied :

"Ah, well, sometimes, when they are very hungry, you know."

"But have you ever known anything of the kind happen?" persisted little Cushie Doo, who, though only a few hours older than her brother Cushat, was much the bolder bird of the two.

"Let us change the subject, children," said the old Ring Dove, "and some day, when you are older and little Cushat's nerves are stronger, I will tell you a stirring story of an adventure I had with a pair of Carrion Crows. Meantime, rest assured you are in no danger,

for we have not a winged enemy of any sort living near this wood now; and even if we had, my early experiences have taught me never to roam far away from my home and children."

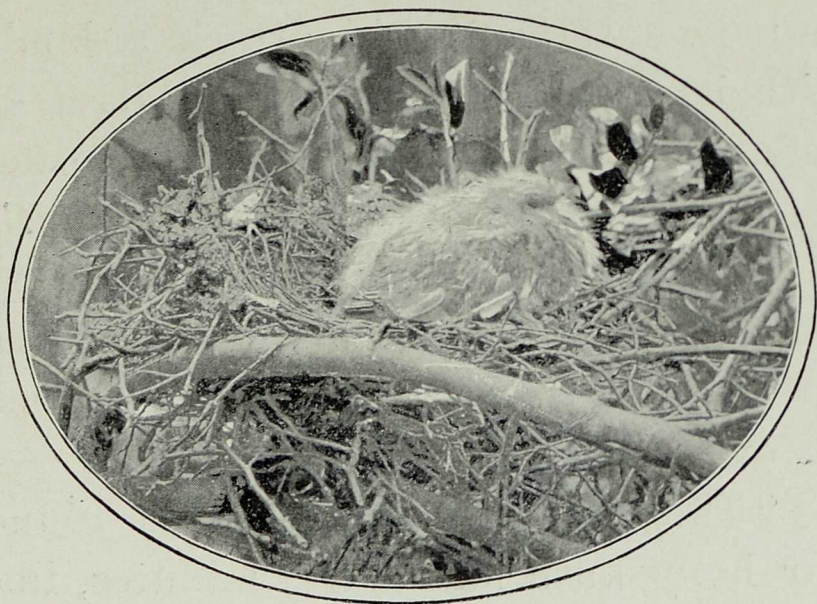
Little Cushie Doo was very fond of a story, and never forgot her mother's promise, of which she kept on reminding her day by day, until she and her brother were well feathered, when the old bird consented to tell them of her hairbreadth escape from a pair of thieving old Carrion Crows.

"My father and mother," she began, "built a nest in an old holly bush growing amongst a lot of lichen-clad rowan trees in Dukerdale Head, and, unfortunately for them, had as neighbours a pair of very evil-disposed Carrion Crows, with a large family of dusky chicks that kept on opening their great bills and Cra—cra—craing for food all day long.

"My parents took great care not to

let Mr. and Mrs. Carrion Crow know where their nest was situated, but a day or two after my poor brother and I opened our eyes a very curious accident happened. One of the Crows was circling high over the wood wherein we all lived, when a Peregrine came sailing along, and, either for fun or spite, stooped like a flash of lightning upon our black neighbour. He missed his stroke; there was only a tremendous clatter of wings, and the Crow rushed down for cover, and, as bad luck would have it, took refuge in our holly bush. My mother was so startled that she left the nest, and, alas! revealed the presence of her chicks to the arch-enemy, who sat panting and terror-stricken on a bough not three feet away.

“It was a long while before the Crow ventured out into the open again, but when he finally did so, after many careful peeps forth, he departed with



LEFT ALONE IN THE NEST.

a wicked smile on his face and his mind fully made up about the future of my poor brother and myself.

“After a while my mother returned, looking the very picture of misery. She knew the Crows had discovered her secret, and would give her no peace until they had devoured both her children. When father returned to roost in the evening, she drew him aside, and they had a long, head-shaking talk. I heard your grandmother say, ‘I’m in

despair. If they will attack a lamb, with its great, strong, horned dam to defend it, what chance has a poor, defenceless Ring Dove against them?’

“We all went to roost feeling very gloomy indeed that night, and soon after daybreak next morning the attack on our home commenced.

“The Crows flew round and round our holly bush for several minutes, like great shadows of death, and then suddenly one of them dashed in and tried to knock my mother off the nest. She struck out wildly at him with the shoulders of her wings, but he did not mind her blows one jot, and, as my brother was sitting on the more exposed side of the nest, he took the opportunity to seize him from beneath his mother’s uplifted wing, and tore out of the bush with him in his strong bill.

“You may be sure, children, I was terribly frightened at this. Your grand-

father dashed wildly after the robber, but it was quite useless. Poor bird! he could do nothing against such fearful odds, and his child went to make all the breakfast the young Carrion Crows had that morning.

“My mother sat panting over me, with her wings spread out and her heart beating in agonised despair. She had made up her mind not to flap her wings again, and thus give our enemy an opportunity of seizing me.

“The female Crow sat on the top of the holly bush and waited until her husband returned to the attack. We had not long to wait before he came thundering through the twigs. My mother, brave bird! would not move an inch, and her assailant struck savagely at her head with his great bill, evidently intending to knock her off the nest. She dodged him, and his head came in violent contact with a stout branch, dislodging a piece of bark and

jarring his neck rather badly. This made him furious, and he was about to renew the attack with redoubled vigour when a tremendous bang rent the air, and his sentinel mate fell dead to the ground.

“An old farmer, with whose eggs the Crows had been making free, observing something unusual was going forth, had crept up with his gun and suddenly ended the career of one of the thieves.

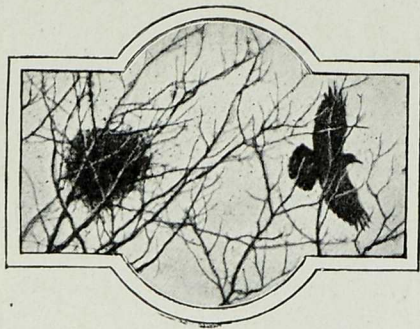
“The report, of course, startled my mother and her assailant very much indeed. The former dashed away down Dukerdale, and the latter through the trees, and then circled high overhead for a long while, calling the farmer all the bad names Crow language could supply.

“It was a terrible strain for any timid bird’s nerves, and I really thought I should never stop shivering with fear, but remember how pleased I was when my mother returned to me.

“The old father Carrion Crow greatly lamented the loss of his wife, and so did my parents the death of their son, but we lived in peace until I was able to fly.”

“What became of the young Crows?”

“Well, the farmer allowed them to live until they could sit about amongst the branches, in the hope of one day catching their father napping, but he was far too wary, so it was ‘Bang, bang, bang,’ and more bad names in the air far overhead.”

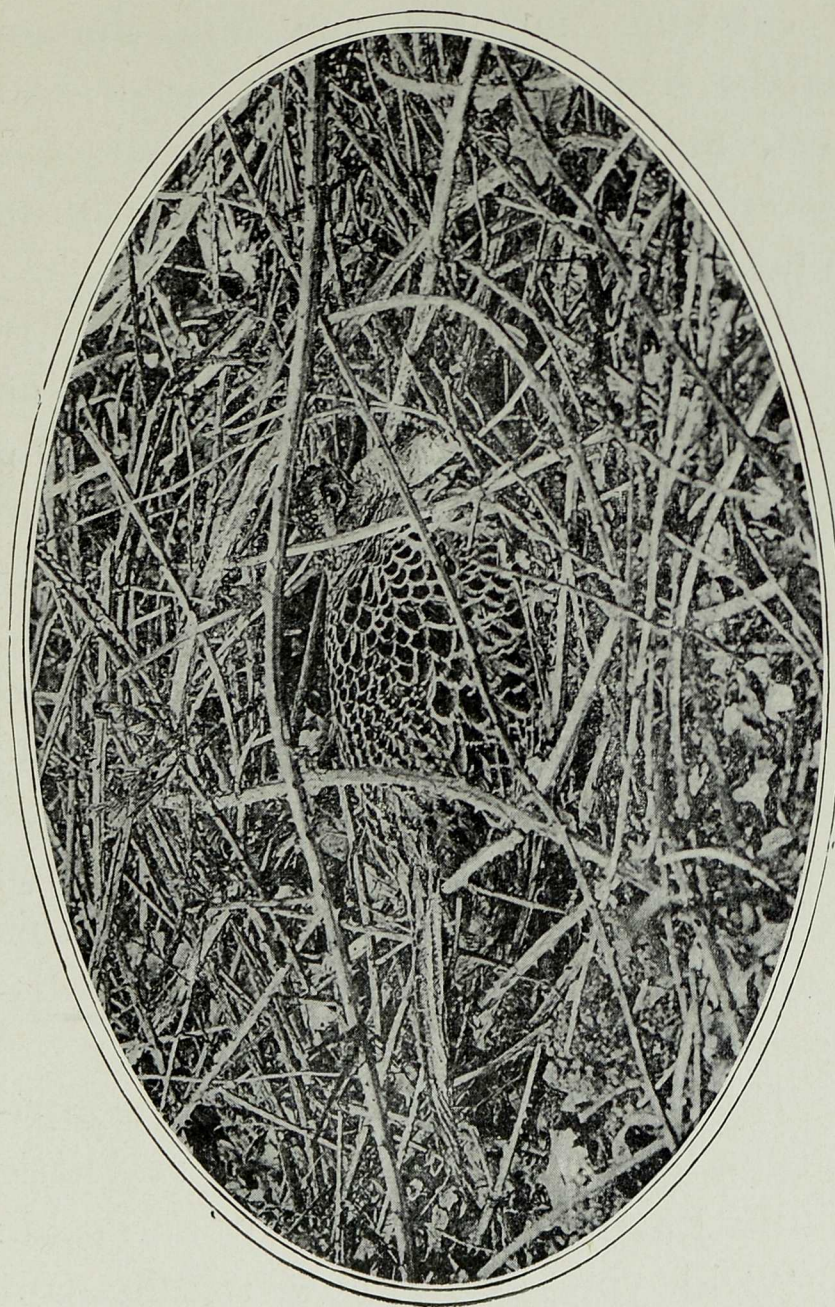


THE WILY OLD FOX AND THE BRAVE MOTHER PHEASANT.

“KEEP quiet, children ; keep quiet. I can see a wily old fox playing with a rabbit’s leg like a puppy dog with a slipper down in the Long Strip Meadow, and if he finds out we are here he will be through the Sandy Spinney and upon us in no time.” Thus spake a mother Pheasant to her family of five little chicks as she sat and covered them under a bramble bush.

“Now if he does happen to come our way,” she continued, “just listen to what I have got to say and act accordingly, for he is a cunning thief, and we shall need to have all our wits about us if we mean to escape him.

“When I sound the alarm and commence to flutter along the ground as if injured and unable to fly, Reynard



‘ SHE SAT AND COVERED THEM UNDER A BRAMBLE BUSH.’

(p. 100)

will most likely give chase in the hope of catching me, and you must immediately scatter north, south, east, and west, and hide until the danger has passed and I come back to call you up to me."

The chicks all promised to do exactly as they were bidden, but luckily had no need to on that occasion, as a passing keeper frightened the fox and sent him helter-skelter home into the dark recesses of Coverdale Wood.

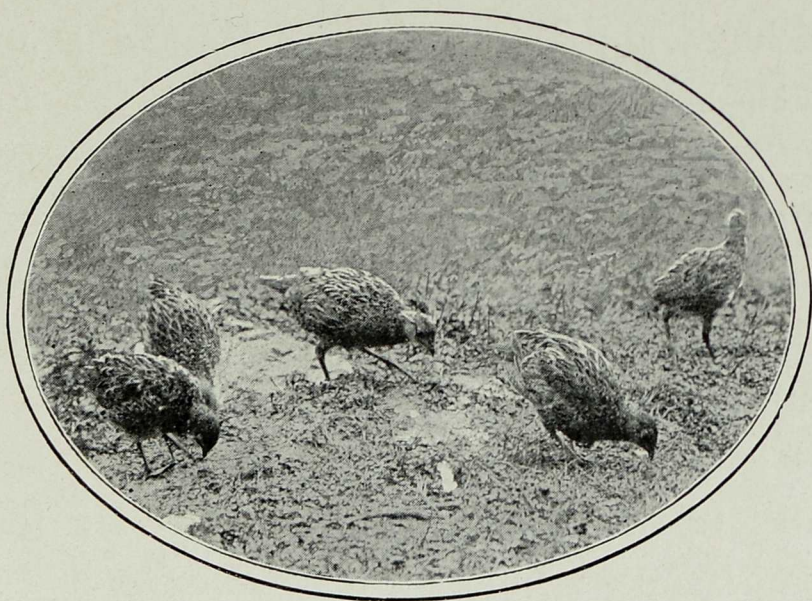
Time, and a plentiful supply of ants' eggs, soon made a great difference in the size of the chicks, and when they next saw Reynard they were fine, strong, well feathered birds, but in spite of this fact their mother seemed greatly distressed by his appearance.

This fact naturally aroused the curiosity of her sons and daughters, and little Willie Early-to-Roost ran up and said :

"Did you ever know a Pheasant caught by a fox, mammy?"

“Yes, my dear,” she answered;
“many a one.”

The little fellow opened his eyes very wide at this, and exclaimed :



“THEY WERE FINE, STRONG, WELL FEATHERED BIRDS.”

(p. 102.)

“Really, mammy?”

“Yes, my mother and all my brothers and sisters were killed by a wicked old fox in a single day, and I only escaped death by a miracle.”

“However did it all happen?” demanded all the chicks excitedly.

“Well, I will tell you, my dears,” replied the parent bird. “I had a very wilful, conceited brother, who thought he knew far more than his mother or anybody else, and one day he said : ‘I’m off to have a drink from the Round Pond at the end of Forty Acre Park.’

“‘No, we cannot go that way,’ replied your granny, ‘because a nasty old fox has found out we use it as a place of call, and he will never rest until he has crunched the bones of somebody. We can all go and have a drink out of the sunken tub with flints in, close by the head keeper’s house.’

“But do what she would the dear old bird could not persuade her obstinate, headstrong son to go her way. He was so persistent that at last we all roamed towards the Round Pond.

“As we approached the water I saw my mother looked agitated about something, but concluded it was the bad behaviour of her son that had ruffled

her feelings. She never took a single sip, but whilst we refreshed ourselves she stood on a knoll close by and craned her neck to see if Reynard was coming. He did not, however, put in an appearance, and we commenced to stroll back towards Spuddleham Fields. We had not gone far before your wilful-wayed uncle had the bad taste to laugh at his mother and call her ‘a nervous old thing.’

“Just to show how clever he was, he ran forward some distance and, peeping into a stunted thorn bush where what he took to be a hare was sitting, cried out mockingly :

“‘A fox, a fox ! Run, children ! run !’

“Had ever jest such a serious ending ? What he in his ignorance took to be a hare was really a fox, and his cries woke Reynard from a nap.

“We could not fly, so of course had to run for our lives, whilst your granny

hobbled along the ground trailing her wings as if wounded beyond the powers of flight. The fox of course turned his attention upon her at once, and I shall never forget the sight of the great red brute in pursuit of my parent. He got so close to her once that he actually pulled some of her tail feathers out in making a snap.

“Poor old bird ! She induced him to follow her some distance, and then rose and disappeared amongst a clump of trees at the end of Forty Acre Park.

“Reynard watched her for a moment, and then retracing his steps to the place where we had disappeared, he lay down quite flat behind a great tussock of reddish brown, half dead grass, the colour of which resembled that of the hair on his back very closely.

“I was hiding under a bramble bush close by, and could see him quite plainly.

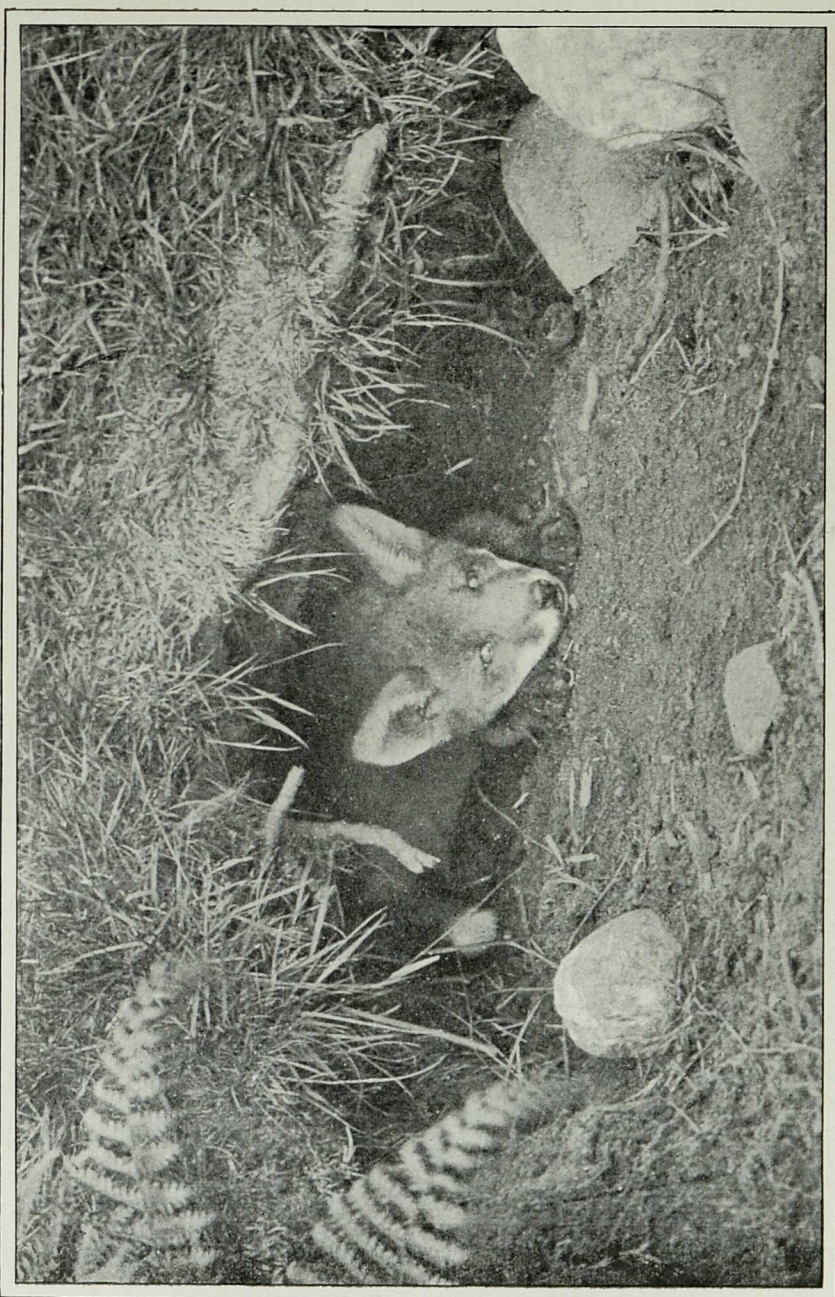
“In a while my mother returned,

walking round and round with her head high in the air and her eyes examining every likely place to hide her unseen foe, who crouched until he almost sank into the ground.

“I was on the point of crying out to alarm her of the danger that lurked so low, but knew that it meant my instant discovery and death, so I lay quite still, thinking my parent would know a great deal better than I how to take care of herself.

“To my horror she approached the fatal tuft of grass more closely, and before she had time even to cry out, poor bird, the arch-rogué had sprung upon her.

“No sooner had he despatched her than he commenced to search for her children, and I suffered the great agony of seeing him find and pounce upon my brothers and sisters just as if they had been mice. He seemed to kill for the wicked pleasure of killing.



“ LYING WITH HIS HEAD OUT OF THE ‘ EARTH. ’ ”

(p. 109.)

“My obstinate brother had hidden close to me, and I should have liked to give him a piece of my mind before he died, but he soon paid dearly for his sins, poor boy !

“I trembled in extreme terror, thinking that it would be my turn to die next, but, being deep in the bramble, the murderer did not discover me.

“Just as the slaughter of the innocents was all but completed, an under keeper happened to come that way, and the fox, hearing him approach, picked up your granny, and, swinging her over his shoulder, made off with her as hard as he could go. The young fellow saw what he was carrying, and bringing his gun to the level, fired a long shot. Reynard was at a safe distance, however, and hurried away to his lair quite unhurt with his prize. His eldest son was lying with his head out of the “earth,” as the breeding hole of a fox is called, whilst other cubs of

the family rolled over each other and played and quarrelled inside.

“The young keeper found the dead bodies of my brothers and sisters, and said some hard things, with every word of which I of course cordially agreed, about ‘them varmints o’ foxes.’

“He luckily also found me, and took me along to his coops, where I was brought up under the care of a kindly old hen. I had plenty to eat and drink, and was safer than I should have been anywhere else, but it was a long while before I got over the loss of my dear old mother and brothers and sisters.”

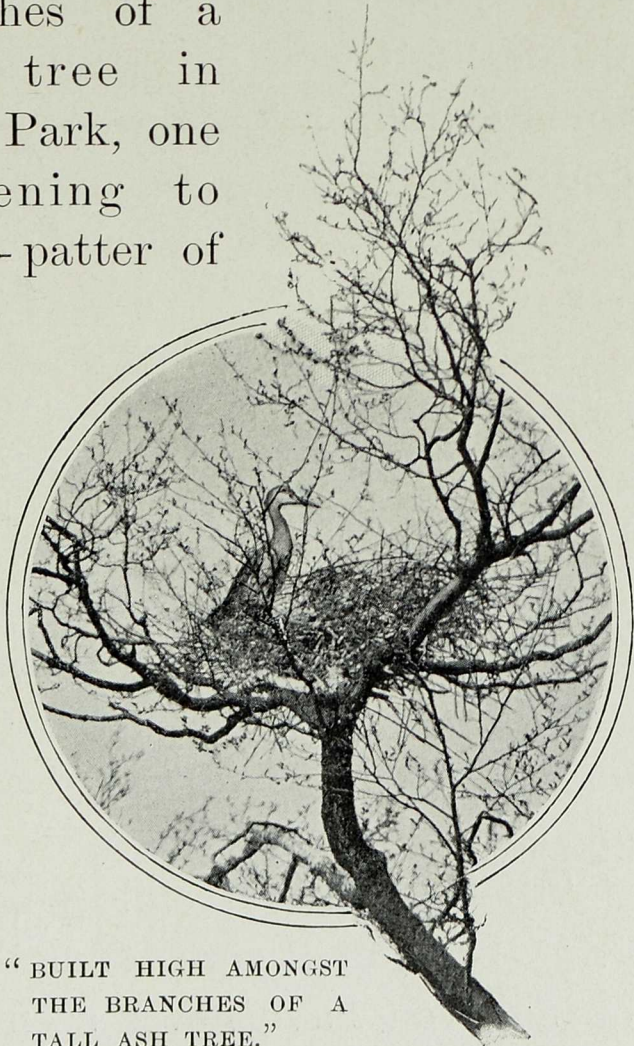
THE HERON AND THE EEL;
 OR,
 THE DANGERS OF A LIVE NECKTIE.

FOUR young Herons sat on the edge of their old stick home, built high amongst the branches of a tall ash tree in Wanstead Park, one day, listening to the pitter-patter of a heavy

A p r i l
 s h o w e r.

As soon as the down-pour was over, they flapped their great, awkward wings,

and said,



"BUILT HIGH AMONGST
 THE BRANCHES OF A
 TALL ASH TREE."

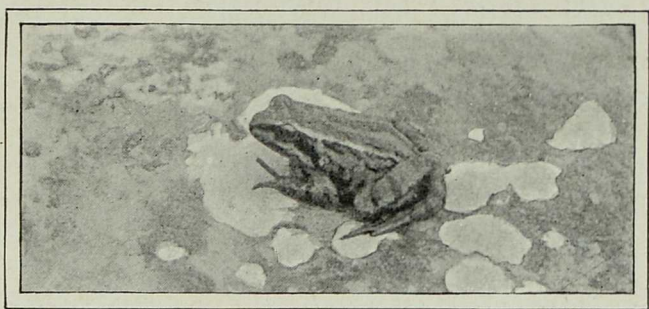
one to another : " Isn't it weary work, waiting for father and mother to bring us along food this wet weather, when the streams are bank full of muddy water, and fish difficult to see ? "

They all kept on turning first the right and then the left eye heavenwards, in eager expectation of something ; and, after an unusually long and weary wait, grew suddenly excited. Their father was descending from the sky with food. At first, he appeared quite a tiny speck against the dark, rolling masses of rain cloud, but at each descending circle he loomed larger and larger, until, with half-closed wings, he shot down, turned in the wind, and flapped heavily on to his nest.

The young Herons became clamorous, and their father said, in a deep, guttural voice :

" Be good, my children, be good. I've brought you something this journey you have never seen before."

The birds all commenced to quiver, as young Herons will, with excitement, when there is anything unusual going forth, and began to guess what their father had caught.



“ ‘ A FROG ! ’ ”

“ A water rat ! ” said Betsy Stir-the-Mud.

“ A frog ! ” cried Nancy Pierce-them-Quick.

“ A trout ! ” exclaimed Tommy Stand-and-Wait.

“ A roach ! ” suggested Billy Weedy-Legs.

“ No ; you are all wrong, my bairns,” replied their father, with a shake of his long bill. “ It’s an eel—a nice, fat eel ! ” And forthwith he produced his prey.

At sight of it the young Herons all cried out, with one voice: "Give it to me! Give it to me, please, father. I am so hungry!"

They had all heard a great deal about the delicate flavour of eels, and were very anxious to taste one.

"Now," went on the old Heron, "I think the fairest way to dispose of the prize will be to give it away as a reward to the child who guesses the following riddle correctly."

"Oh, we're bad at conundrums," said Billy and Tommy and Betsy; but Nancy never uttered a word. She was a sensible bird, and considered it best to hear what the riddle was all about.

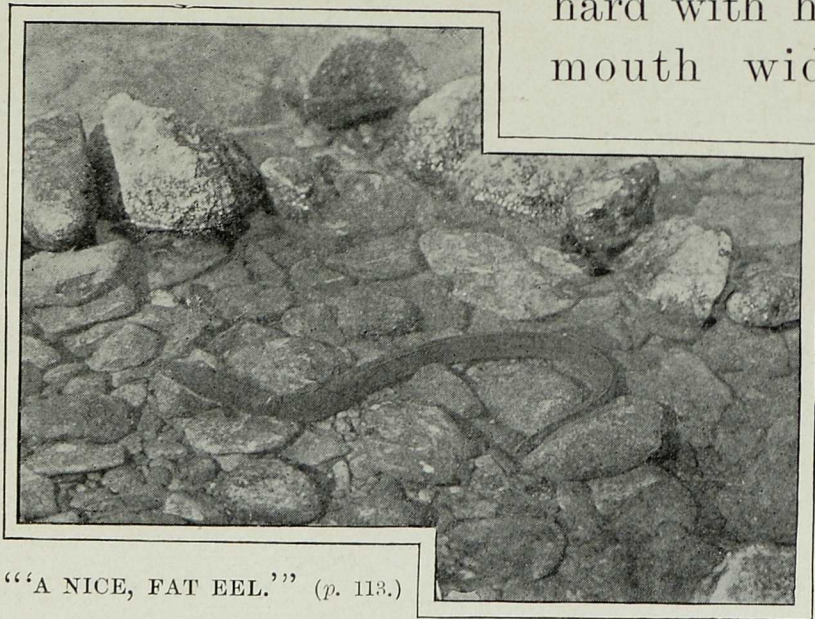
"When is an eel not an eel?"

"When it's a black horse hair," answered Billy, with a grin, just to show how clever he was.

"No, my boy, you are wrong. Strange to say, many people think that black horse hairs that fall into the

water turn into eels ; just the same as they believe that minnows grow into trout. Both things are utterly impossible," said the old Heron.

Tommy was the dull member of the family, and, saying nothing, stared very hard with his mouth wide



"A NICE, FAT EEL." (p. 113.)

open, and waited for his elder sister, Nancy, in whom he placed great reliance, to speak.

At length she replied : " When it's like a chicken, an egg, father."

" Capital, capital, little lassie ; you've won the prize fairly, and here

it is!" cried her father, greatly pleased at his daughter's wisdom.

The eel was not quite dead, and, twisting itself round its winner's legs, very nearly made her tumble off the nest in her efforts to set herself free from its coils.

This amused the other chicks very much, and they all laughed heartily at their sister.

"You need not laugh," remarked their parent; "for that is an awkward trick eels have, and reminds me of a perilous time I once had with a living necktie round my throat.

"I was standing in a shallow pool in the upper reaches of the River Lea one evening, when an eel came wriggling along. He never saw me until he was right under my feet, and it was then too late to escape. I made a dart at him, and my long, sharp bill went right through his head and a long way into the bed of the river below.

“When you catch an eel it is a good thing to make straight for the bank with him, for there’s many a slip between the catch and the despatch, when you are dealing with slippery customers, so I walked right out into a field with my prey, and he gave me a great fright.”

“How, father?” asked all the young Herons, excitedly.

“Why, he instantly coiled himself round my neck and tied his wriggling body into a knot.

“This completely stopped my breath and I rolled head over heels, flapped my wings, jumped up, ran round, and kicked in my terror, but to no purpose; I was being slowly hanged, and the worst of it was, I could neither open my bill nor shake it clear of his head.

“I soon turned giddy and faint. Objects around me grew dimmer and dimmer. I was dying! when the rascal suddenly changed his mind, relaxed his



DADDY HERON.

hold upon my neck, and tried to coil again in the opposite direction. Getting one welcome gulp of fresh air, I shot my head into a little thorn bush. This saved me, for, instead of the eel getting round my neck he twisted his body about a branch, and I withdrew my bill promptly. You cannot tell how thankful I felt, children."

"What became of the eel after that?" enquired Tommy.

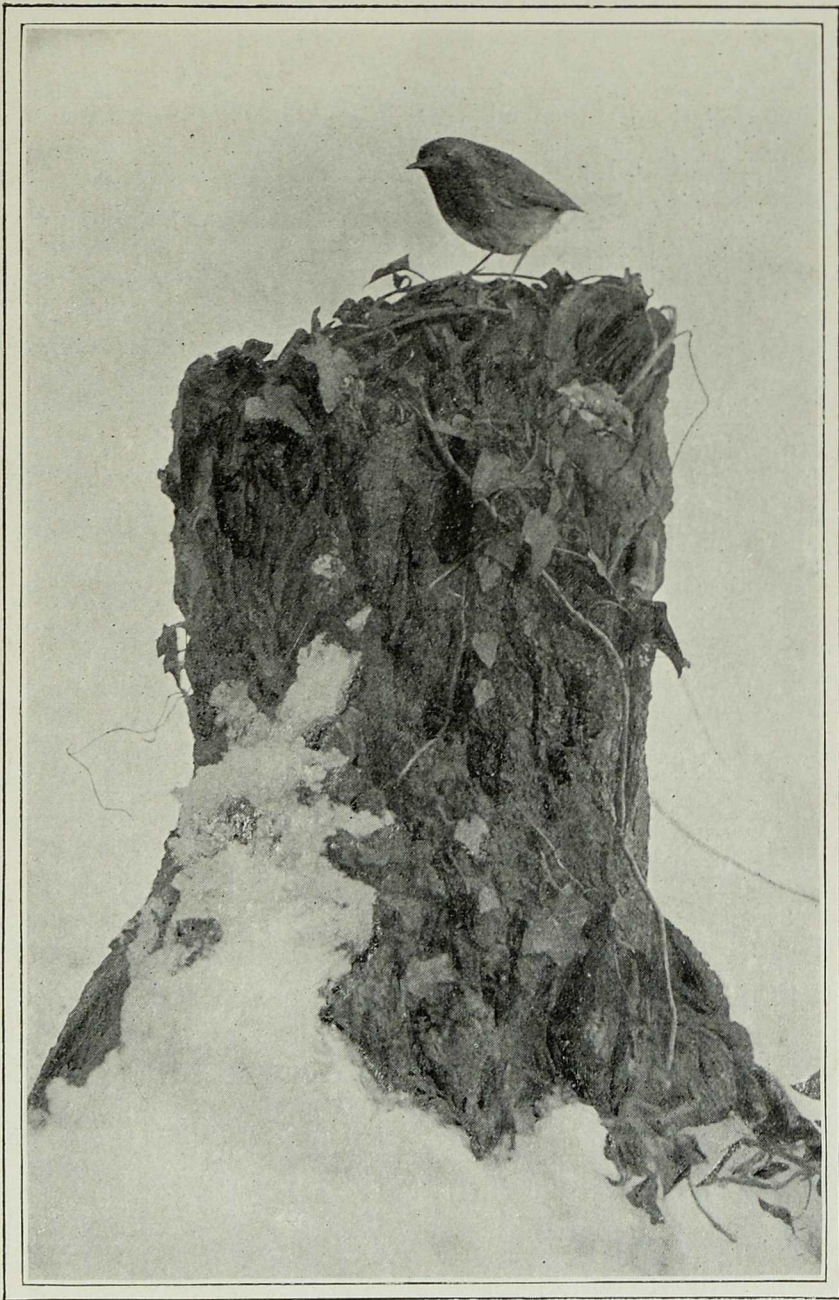
"I don't know," said his father. "I was only too glad to get away without such a necktie about me."

HOW COCK ROBIN LOST HIS TAIL.

It was a real winter's day. The wind was blowing bitterly cold from the east, and great flakes of snow were riding merrily upon its dark wings. Some were striking trees, others walls, garden palings, or whatever else stood erect in their slanting path, and all were clinging like plaster wherever they struck.

A number of Starlings, Sparrows, and Chaffinches sat on a fence with their feathers puffed out until they looked like little balls of plumage, and dolefully faced the blast.

"It strikes me very forcibly we are in for more hard times," said an old Cock Starling to his companions. "The ground is frozen as hard as rock, and I like not this leaden sky and biting wind. It means going hungry to roost



“ ‘ WHATEVER HAVE YOU DONE WITH YOUR TAIL ? ’ ”
(p. 122.)

for a good many feathered folks, I fear."

Just then a perky little Robin Redbreast hopped out of a kitchen sink where he had been looking for unconsidered scraps, and alighting on an old stump, gave a sharp *trit, trit*, and bade his neighbours "Cheer up."

The gloominess of the outlook was forgotten in an instant. They all burst out laughing, and a sly old Cock Sparrow asked :

"Whatever have you done with your tail, Master Scarlet-Chest?"

Redbreast did not take the slightest notice of the merriment created by his odd appearance, but promptly answered : "Changed it for another."

"Isn't the new one ready yet, then?" enquired a Starling.

"Oh, yes, quite. I've got it with me," said the cheerful one.

"Where is it? Under your wing?"

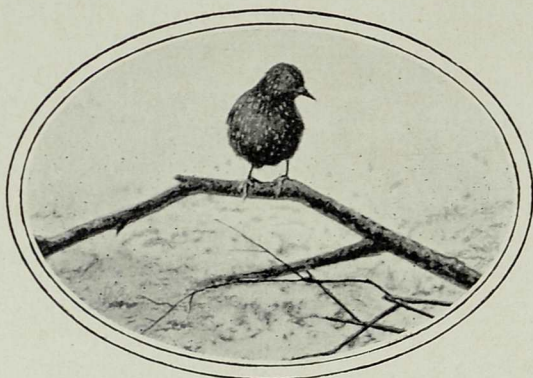
queried a gaily dressed old Cock Chaffinch.

“No, the crown of my head.”

“Come, come, Master Window-Sill Favourite, tell us what you’ve done with your tail. We’re bad at riddles,” chirruped the Sparrow, looking round at all the other birds, in order to enjoy the measure of their admiration for his cleverness in handling irritating names.

“You are a smart bird, Mr. Chimney-Pot Nightingale. I know now why farmers only give the twelfth part of a half-penny for a head like yours. It’s a new saying, but a true one, ‘People who live in glass houses generally start the stone-throwing,’” rapped out the Robin coldly.

This turned the laugh against Master Cock Sparrow, and it was plain to see that he did not enjoy the nasty allusions to his lack of song and the price farmers pay clubs of shooters for the heads of members of his family.



THE SAGACIOUS YOUNG STARLING.

“Oh, I see your little joke; I see it,” said a sagacious young Starling. “You’ve changed the

tail you used to shake for one you can tell.”

“Let us hear it, let us hear it!” shouted the whole company from one end of the garden fence to the other, and Redbreast began rather pompously:

“Friends, neighbours, and acquaintances” (glancing towards the Sparrows when he uttered the last word), “if I were to tell you that little Daisy Crumbs-o’-Bread is very kind to all birds, especially” (“those that hang about on window-sills,” suggested Cock Sparrow in a whisper to his companions, who tittered) “in winter time, when the snow-flakes are flying, it

would not be news, but some of you may be interested to know that she has a male relative named Jack Catch-'em-in-Traps staying at her house just now, and that he is setting all kinds of nets and things to capture us.

“Only this morning I flew over into Daisy's garden, and what happened?”

“You lost your tail,” shouted half a dozen birds at once.

“I did, gentlemen—I mean ladies and gentlemen, every blessed feather of it.”

Robin Redbreasts are homely birds, and cannot keep up a grand make-believe style of speech for long; and when the birds heard “every blessed feather of it” slip out, they knew that Robert had forgotten to be artificial, and they were going to hear a plain tale in plain language.

“As I said just now, when those young rascals interrupted me, I flew

over into Daisy's garden, and found a nice, clean, brown board, with a little table covered with crumbs in the middle of it and a strong perch on either side. I was very hungry, and said to myself, 'What a good little girl Daisy Crumbs-o'-Bread is, to be sure,' and hopped up to taste the food.

"No sooner had I alighted on one of the perches I have just mentioned and commenced to peck, than I got a great surprise. Down it went bang, and something flew over my head like lightning, and also came down crash upon the board on the other side of me. I tried to jump up and fly away, but oh ! horror of horrors, I could not. I was under a net, a helpless, hopeless prisoner.

"Little Jack had been watching his trap from an upper window, and presently rushed out upon me in a great state of excitement. He danced round and yelled, 'I've caught a bird !



“ ‘AND THEN SHE LECTURED HIM.’ ” (p. 128.)

I've caught a bird! Where is your old Canary-cage, Daisy?’

“When Daisy came out, she did not bring the cage, but cried out, ‘Oh, you nasty, cruel boy! Don't you hurt my little Robin, or you'll catch it when Daddy comes home.’

“Then the artful little woman dropped her voice and said coaxingly, ‘Isn't he a pretty little dear,

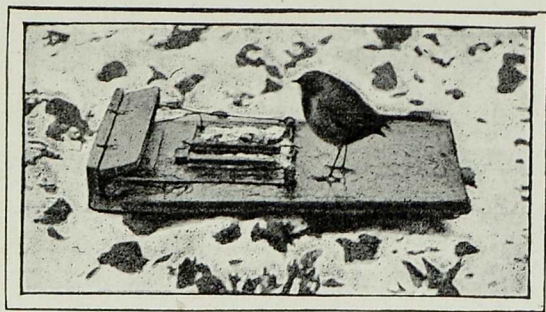
Jack? Let us see him out of the trap.'

"I knew the suggestion was meant to give me a chance to escape, and I wasn't going to neglect it. So when Jack opened the trap, I dashed for liberty. Just as I gained wing he clutched at me, but was too late, and instead of grasping my body, he only got hold of my tail, and I came away without it.

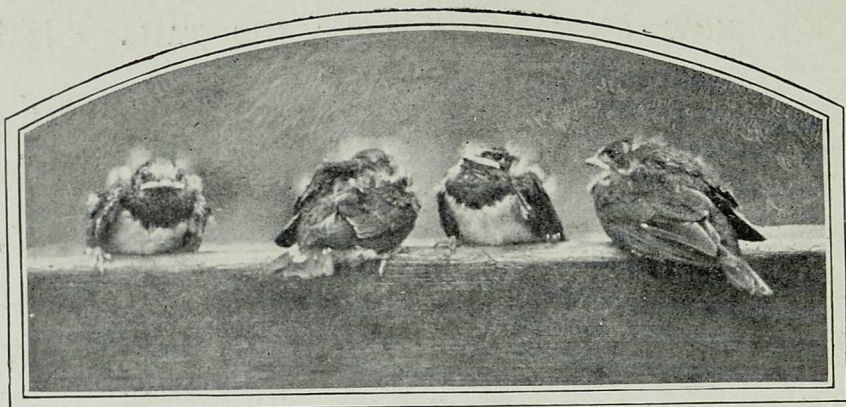
"Daisy was delighted, and laughed and clapped her hands until her relative became nasty, and then she lectured him."

"You had a very lucky escape," said an old Starling. "Better be abroad with a tale to tell than in a cage with one you can only wear out against the bars, and I am sure we are all thankful to you for the timely warning you have given us of our danger. Hello! I see the young rascal out with an air-gun now. Let us be off."

Ping went the weapon in the hands of the bloodthirsty youth, but his deadly bit of lead missed its mark, and, striking an old oak post, glanced off and went whistling away harmlessly across the next garden. The birds all took wing instantly and flew away.



COCK ROBIN AT THE TRAP.



“FOUR NEWLY-FLEDGED BARN SWALLOWS.”

THE BITER BIT ;
OR,
*THE PUNISHMENT OF A THIEVING OLD
COCK SPARROW.*

“WHATEVER is all the twittering and excitement in Sparrow-town this morning about, Mr. Redbreast?” enquired four newly-fledged Barn Swallows, who were sitting all in a row on a piece of timber in Farmer Hayseed’s cattle-yard, waiting for their parents to bring them along any winged insects they could catch.

“Why, bless my life ! Haven’t you heard the news this morning, my dears?” exclaimed Cock Robin, in great surprise.

"No, we haven't," replied the wee birds eagerly. "Whatever is it?"

"Well, the Sparrow that killed my great-grandfather has just been hanged."

"How dreadful!" twittered the fledglings. "We didn't know you had had so near a relative murdered, Mr. Redbreast. How did he die—by poison?"

"What an ignorant family!" ejaculated Cock Robin, in disgust. "Do you mean to tell me your mother never repeated to you the nursery rhyme, 'Who killed Cock Robin?'" he asked in a rising storm of anger.

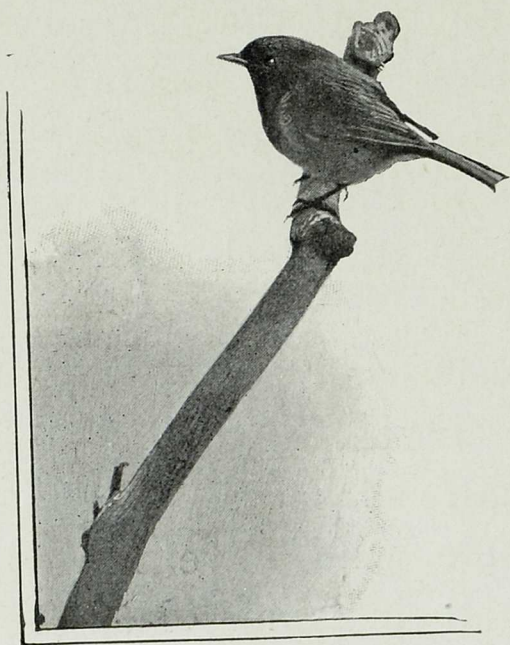
"Never! This is the very first we have ever heard of it," declared the chicks.

Nothing disgusts vain birds who think they have been celebrated in song or story, half so much as the meeting with people who have never heard of them or their fame. Master Redbreast's feelings were visibly hurt,

and, perking up his tail, he shouted rather rudely :

“Ask your well-informed mother, when she comes home, what’s going forth in Sparrow-town”; and disappeared over a moss-clad garden wall in high dudgeon.

When the old Barn Swallow came along with her catch of flies, the fledglings told her all that had happened, and begged her to repeat to them the rhyme entitled “Who killed Cock Robin?”



She told them she did not remember a word of it, and tried to excuse herself by declaring that she did not believe in filling the heads of young birds who had their living to get by hard

work with such silly nonsense. Her children were so persistent, however, that at last she was obliged to rake her memory, and try to recite for them the gory song of a gory tragedy.

She had only got out, "Let me see. I think it begins :

"Who slew Mr. Redbreast ?

'Me,' said the Goldcrest—"

when up popped Master Robin from behind the wall over which he had flown, and said :

"That's all wrong, besides being ungrammatical."

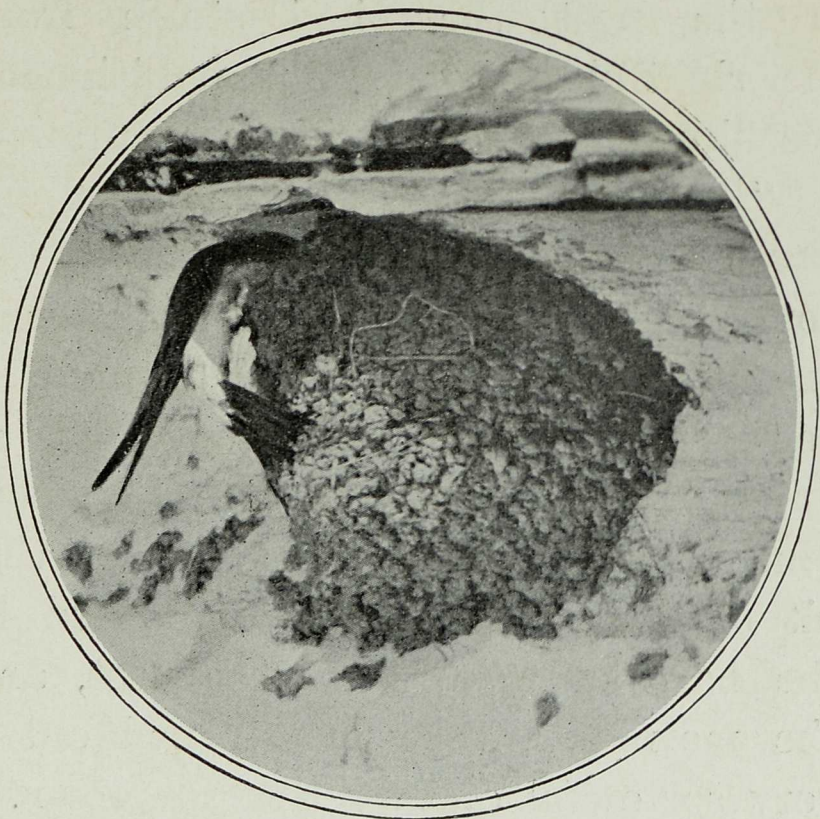
Mrs. Barn Swallow was not in a position to deny either accusation, so she just winked at her chicks and invited her neighbour with mock sweetness to step down and complete the neglected education of her children.

Vanity and weakness fly upon the same pair of wings, and Master Cock Robin, quite unable to appreciate Mrs. Barn Swallow's sarcasm, took his stand

on a stump in front of the fledglings, and recited with great gusto, "Who killed Cock Robin?"

He was so delighted with the warmth of its reception that he forgot all about his recent anger, and at once went on to tell the young Swallows what had happened during the morning in Sparrow-town.

"You know," he commenced, "that your genteel cousins, the House Martins, have had a great deal of difficulty in making their nests stick under the eaves of the parsonage this year, owing to the dry weather and the consequent scarcity of suitable mud. Well, no sooner have they finished building, and got their little homes nicely lined with straws and feathers, than they are shamefully robbed of them in broad light of day by a number of ruffianly old Sparrows. Instead of building nests for themselves, these dishonest loafers have been idling about on chimney



“‘THE HOUSE MARTINS HAVE HAD A GREAT DEAL OF
DIFFICULTY IN MAKING THEIR NESTS.’” (p. 134.)

pots and tree tops for days past, joking and laughing about the new houses they were waiting for the ‘mud and feather’ contractors to finish for them.

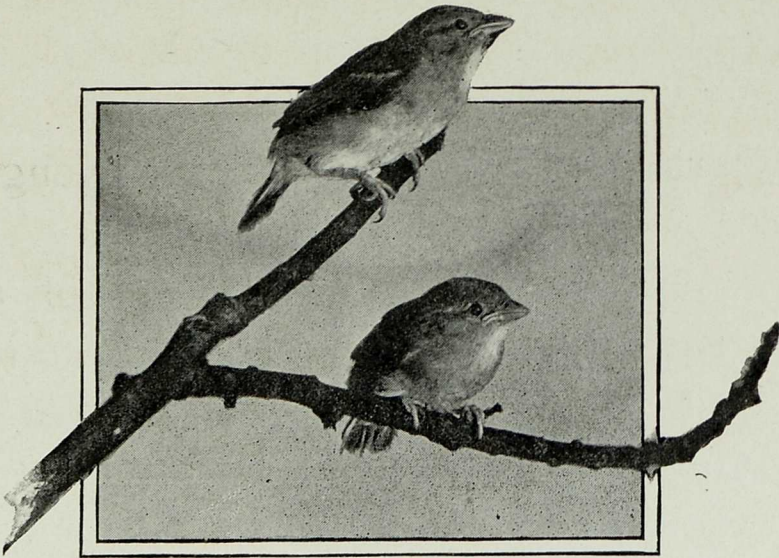
“They took forcible possession this morning, and one pair of birds even went the disgraceful length of turning out and smashing three eggs laid

in the nest they had stolen from the rightful owner. But punishment speedily followed this piece of brutality.

“The old male Sparrow, whilst engaged in an admiring inspection of the home he and his wife had just stolen, unexpectedly got his head through a noose in a piece of string used as lining material by the ‘mud and feather’ contractors. The opposite end of this bit of twine was firmly embedded in the hard outer wall of the nest, and the morning’s work has turned out a very sorrowful one for Sparrow-town.

“No sooner did Master Cock Sparrow feel himself fast than he became frantic with rage, thinking that the Martins had played some trick upon him. He rushed outside, but only got as far away as the length of the string would allow him to go, and then fluttered and tugged until his eyes grew dim and all the breath left his little body. His wife was terror-

stricken. She screamed and tugged first at one wing and then at the other with the idea of helping to release him, but all to no purpose. She was really making matters worse. Her husband



“ ‘TWO BABY SPARROWS.’ ”

died a felon's death, and is now swinging in the wind, with an excited crowd of neighbours chattering noisily on the roof above him, and a number of boys and girls gazing up curiously at him from below.

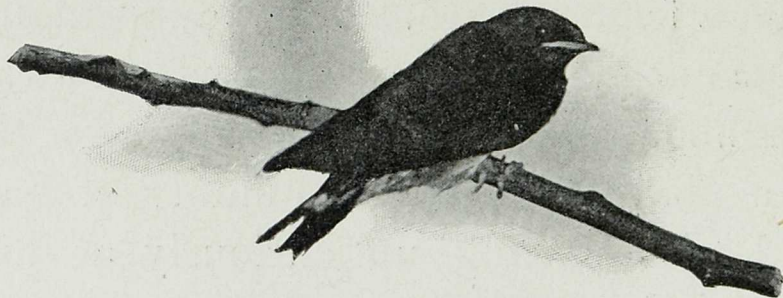
“ Whilst I was there, two baby

Sparrows, the children of honest parents, came to have a look, and the Martins kept on twittering out: 'Honesty is the safest policy!'

"By-and-by one of them caught sight of me under a gooseberry bush, and shouted at the top of his voice:

"'Ah, Master Cock Robin, your immortal great-grandfather is avenged now.'

"This turned the attention of all Sparrow-town upon me, and, thinking it best to 'let bygones be bygones,' I beat a hasty retreat."



BABY HOUSE MARTIN.

HOW A LITTLE FAT GANNET LOST HIS GRANDFATHER.

A LITTLE fat Gannet sat all alone in his nest built on the topmost ledge of a great ocean cliff, against the foot of which the waves boomed and splashed all day long.

Like all baby Gannets of his age, he was clothed in a beautiful dress of spotless white down, which he longed to change for one of feathers, in order that he might cease to fear a fall into the yawning abyss beneath him, and be able to wing his way through the air whithersoever he pleased, in safety.

Farther along the eastern face of the dizzying precipice he could see great numbers of adult Gannets. Some were sitting in queenly stateliness on their nests, others leaving the rock and flying out to sea, and, sad to relate,

a few were even engaged in unseemly squabbling over the rights to sit on a particular crag or the possession of a bit of seaweed.

By-and-by his mother sailed into view, and alighting on the edge of the nest, produced a lovely herring. The fish had only just been caught, and its sides sparkled in the morning sunshine like burnished silver.

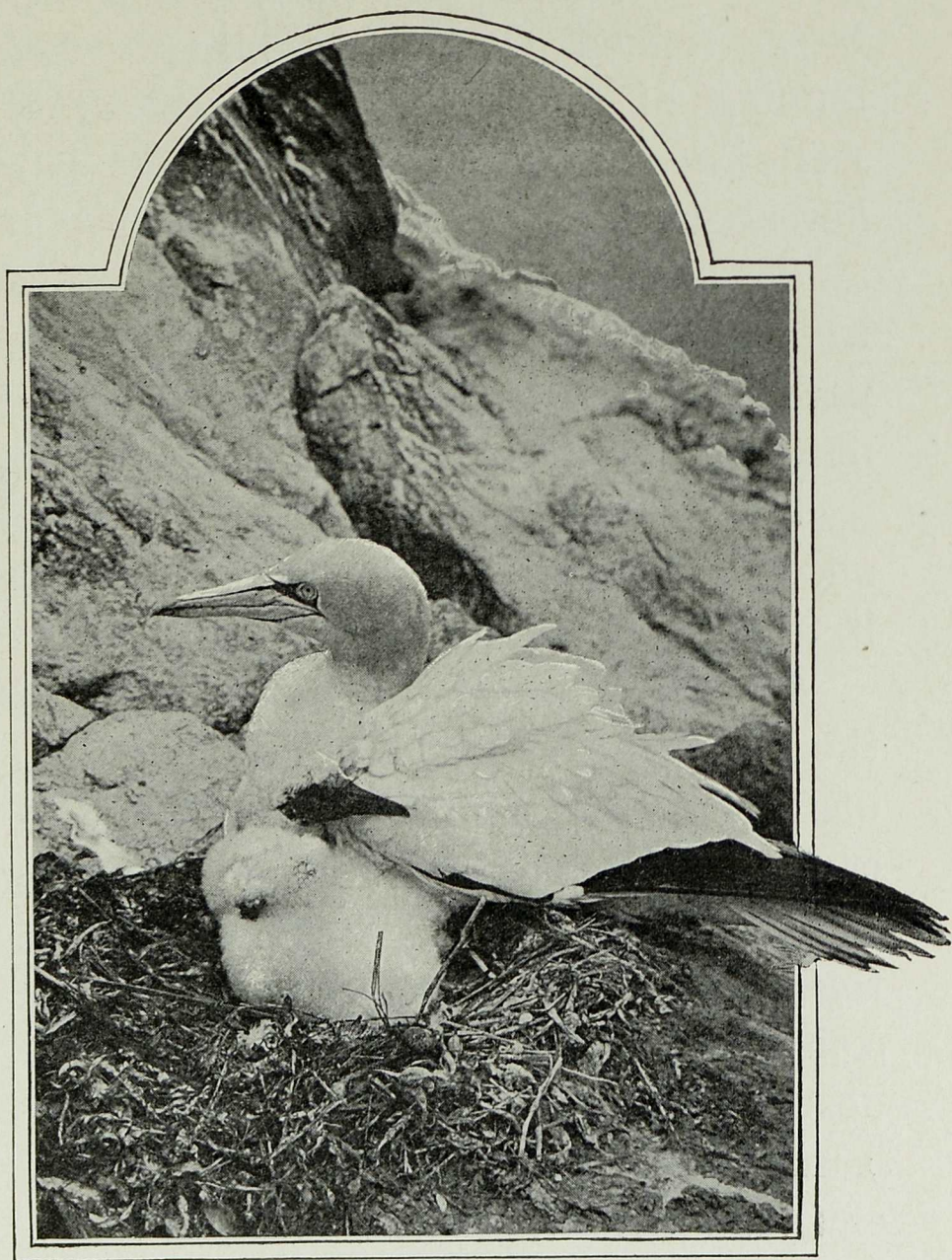
“That is a bonny herring; wherever did you catch it, mother?” exclaimed the young Gannet.

“In the sea, my dear—in the sea; where did you think I should catch it?”

“Yes, yes, mother, I know; but in what part of the sea?”

“Ah! that’s another question. It came from a place called Cheat Herring Bay.”

“Cheat Herring Bay! Cheat Herring Bay! That is a queer name, mother,” said the youthful one. “I didn’t know herrings cheated.”



MASTER GANNET AND HIS MOTHER.

“No, neither do they, Sula, my boy,” replied the elder bird. “The naming of that bay is a queer story well known to all Gannets that live hereabouts.”

This aroused young Sula’s curiosity to concert pitch, and he begged his parent to tell him all about the naming of Cheat Herring Bay.

The old bird shuffled her wings, and, puffing up her back plumage as if to refresh her memory, began :

“Well, Sula, the people of these, the Orkney Islands, once took a great dislike to our family ; they said we caught more herrings during a year than all the fishermen in Scotland put together, and determined to think out some plan by which they might destroy a lot of us. They were, of course, well acquainted with our habit of flying over the bosom of the ocean and plunging headlong upon any suitable fish swimming near the surface,

and an ingenious fellow, who could draw and paint a bit, planned out a dreadful thing.

“He secured a block of wood, and after painting it sea-green, drew a nice fat herring life-size upon it. As soon as ever the whole was quite dry, he took the evil thing out into Cheat Herring Bay, and mooring it so that it would float a little way below the surface of the water, rowed ashore and sighted his telescope to watch what happened.

“It was a dull morning, with a fresh breeze blowing from the southwest and a nice ripple on the sea. Ah! I remember it so well, because I was being taken out for my first lesson in fishing, and it cost me so much. My father was a most fearless bird, and would plunge upon fish that more discreet Gannets would for half a dozen reasons have left alone.

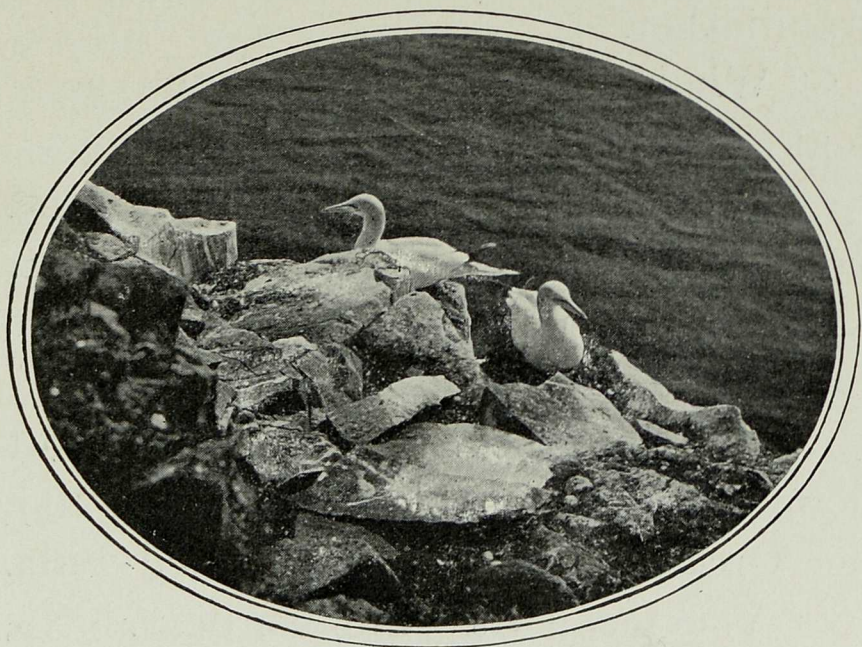
“We were flying along slowly

against the wind, when my father suddenly exclaimed, 'Watch me, Bassano. I see a nice fat herring below, and I'm going to show you how to catch him.' With that he closed his wings, poor bird, and plunged like an arrow into the sea below, and disappeared beneath a patch of foam.

" 'Isn't that clever? Your father is the grandest plunger I ever saw,' said my mother proudly. Dear old mother! Her admiration was soon turned to alarm, for when the foam floated away, instead of your grandfather rising triumphantly with his prey, he lay quite motionless on the surface of the sea with his wings stretched out.

" My mother sounded the alarm note, and we were soon joined by a lot of neighbours and friends. We all circled in a great cloud over your grandfather's dead body, but nobody could guess how he had met his fate,

until the man who had painted the counterfeit herring on the block of wood put down his telescope and came off in a boat to examine the result of his wicked handiwork.



“ ‘ WE WERE MARRIED, AND DECIDED TO RETURN TO THE
OLD HOME.’ ”

(p. 147.)

“ He seemed immensely pleased over his cruel ingenuity when he discovered that your grandfather had struck the painted herring and broken his poor neck by the sudden contact with the hard piece of wood.”

“How dreadful!” gasped little Sula.

“Yes, it was, indeed; and my mother never got over the shock of it all, for she was devoted to your grandfather.”

“What did you do after the accident?”

“We left the neighbourhood and went to live at a place called St. Kilda, away out in the Atlantic, where your granny gradually pined and died.”

“And did the St. Kildonians paint sham herrings on blocks of wood like the Orcadians, mother?” queried Sula.

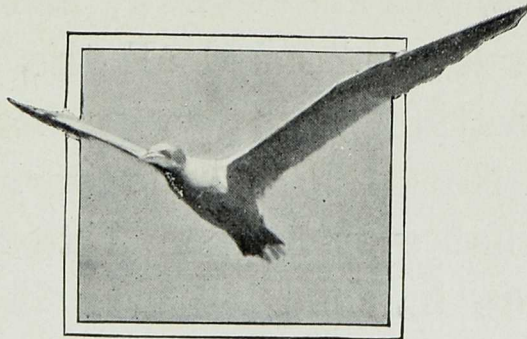
“You mean St. Kildans, dear. No, but they had a nasty habit of stealing amongst the sleeping Gannets during dark nights, and killing as many as they could lay their hands upon. This practice got so bad that at last a number of wakeful old male birds were appointed to watch over their sleeping companions, and when a sentinel gave

the alarm we all took wing instantly and flew away."

"And why did you come back to the Orkney Islands, mother?"

"Ah, that's another story. The season after your grandfather was killed, Cheat Herring Bay was filled with pictures of herrings on timber, and many necks were in consequence broken.

"Your father came with other birds out to St. Kilda, and I met him. We were married, and decided to return to the old home, which is now quite safe, as the herring artist is dead, and timber and time too scarce to be wasted on birds that have become too well educated to be cheated."



FATHER GANNET ON THE WING.

THE MOTHER SKYLARK AND THE STARING OX.

“You have a great deal to learn, my children, yet—a very great deal,” said a mother Skylark to her chicks, as she sat and covered them in their nice warm nest during the downpour of a heavy thunder shower.

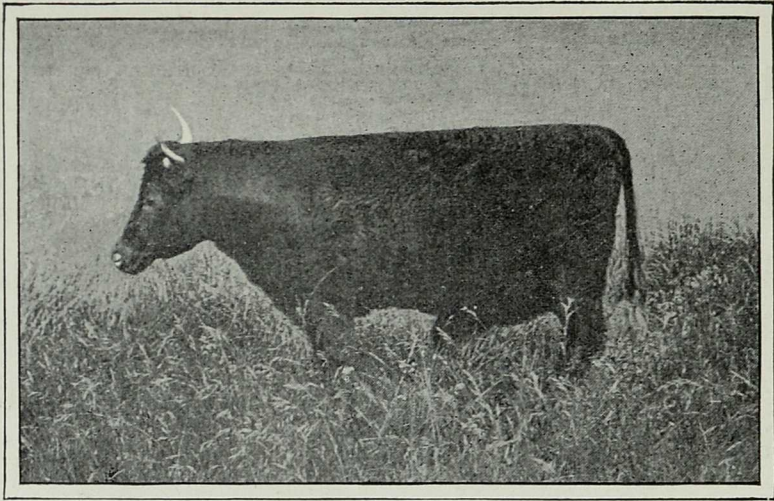
“When you have homes and children of your own, you must always face the wind and spread out your wings a little, so that the collecting rain drops trickling down your backs will not find their way into your nests, but run harmlessly away on either side.”

“Yes, yes! we know, mother; but that’s a lesson,” cried all the chicks in one breath, “and we want a funny story. Now tell us the very funniest thing that ever happened to you since you were hatched.”

"Let me see, let me see," said the old bird musingly, as she shook the remains of her last dust bath out of her plumage. "Oh, I know; it happened to me last summer in Beckton Park. A bird of my age could hardly be expected to go through life without a few queer experiences, but I think the one I am going to tell you about was the most startling and amusing that ever happened to a Skylark.

"I had made my nest on the side of a gently sloping hill, which was well clothed with buttercups and daisies, in spite of the herd of cattle that grazed the Park. One day a mischievous boy discovered it, and took away three out of my five eggs, so that I only hatched off two chicks, which I christened Billy Soar-High and Sally Sit-on-the-Fence.

"Upon returning one afternoon from a long journey in search of food, which was scarce, in consequence of a long run of dry weather, I found a huge



“‘A RED OX STANDING CLOSE TO MY HOME.’”

red ox standing close to my home, and staring straight into it. He was just the usual great good-natured looking fellow that never does a Lark any harm, unless it be by accidentally treading on her nest and crushing whatever it happens to contain, so I alighted and ran swiftly up to my open-mouthed children.

“Just as I neared them a strange thing happened. The ox gave out the queerest sound I ever heard in all my life. It wasn't a cough or a sneeze or a bellow, but just a short, sharp, start-

ling *slam* that made me jump as if I had been shot. I had never heard an animal of any kind make such a strange noise before, so stood a dozen yards away and listened a while. There was not another sound, and the ox just stood and stared and stared without lifting leg or wagging tail, so I carefully approached my nest again. As I drew near, I was greatly surprised to discover that the beast actually had an eye in his chest."

"In his chest?" queried all the chicks in chorus.

"Yes, in his chest, children!"

"How wonderful!" said the young birds.

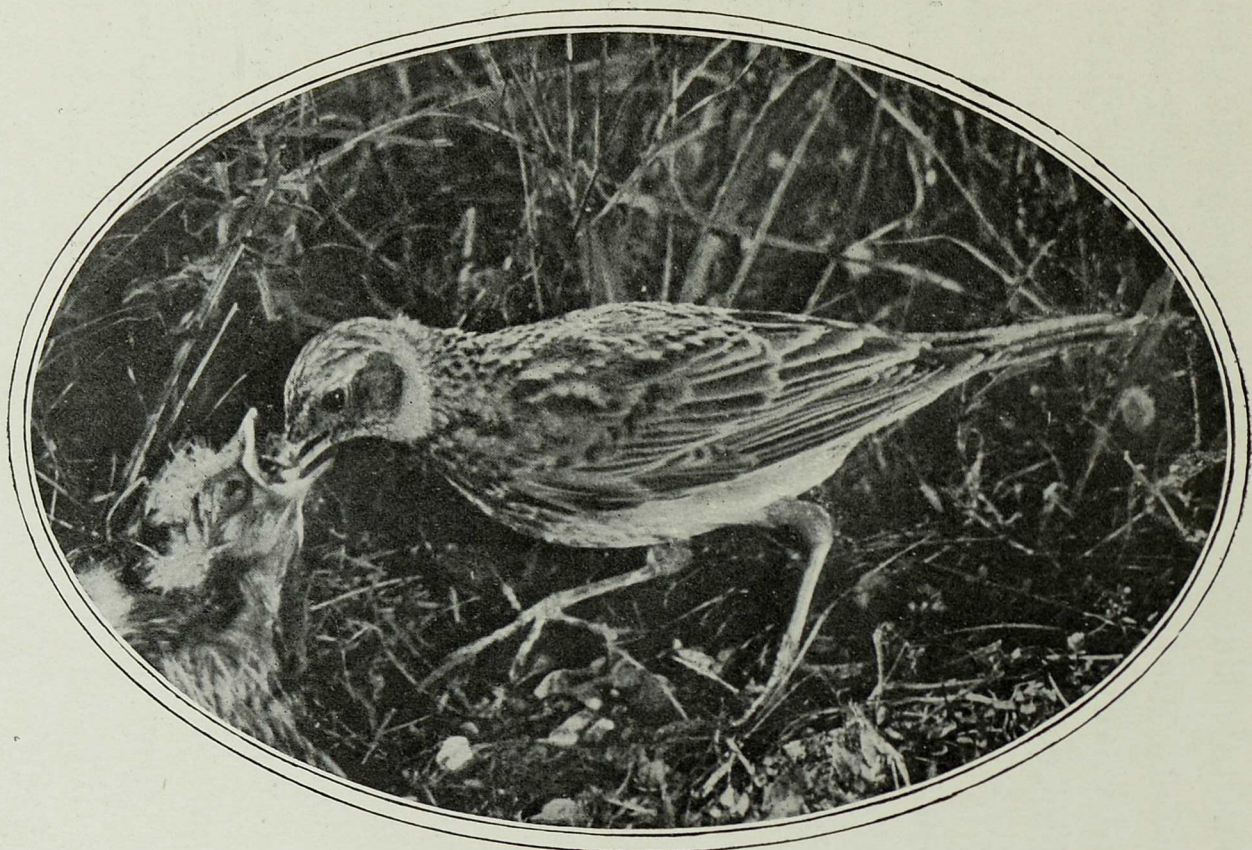
"Yes, and, like those in the creature's head, it was staring, and staring straight into my nest.

"After waiting and watching for some time, Billy and Sally got so hungry and clamorous that I could not resist their appeals for food any longer,

so crept quietly up. This time nothing whatever happened until I was in the very act of putting a tit-bit into my son's mouth, when I distinctly saw our visitor's breast eye wink, and *slam* went the strange something. As I flew away I was astonished to hear the ox say, in man language, 'Got you.'

"This scared me more than ever, and my heart went pitter-patter like hail on the roof of a tin barn. I was nearly terrified out of my wits, and it was a long while before I ventured back again. When I did, I found my children crying. They were saying to each other that I was a hard-hearted mother, who didn't love them a bit, and were nearly broken-hearted; so I ran boldly up to the nest and divided the food I had brought along between them.

"This time nothing whatever happened until I looked up at the ox,



““I WAS IN THE VERY ACT OF PUTTING A TIT-BIT INTO MY SON’S MOUTH.”” (p. 152.)

when *slam* went the strange something behind the great winking eye in his chest, and a voice in man language said softly, 'Got you again, my little Dicky-bird!'

"Away I flew down the wind in search of more food. Whatever could it all mean? I asked myself as I ran hither and thither catching winged insects amongst the grass. But puzzle my brains as I would, I could not for the life of me make out why the great beast stood and stared into my nest.

"Hour after hour went by, and every time I came back to feed my children *slam* went the strange something, until I commenced to grow used to it.

"During the afternoon my chicks begged me to sit down and cover them, as they wanted to take a nap, and so I did as they wished and composed myself.

"By-and-by *slam* went the strange something again, and oh! horror of

horrors, what do you think happened? Why, a man with a camera dropped out of the inside of the ox. It was a stuffed one, and he had been hiding in it and taking snap-shots of me and my open-mouthed bairns, and the strange something that went *slam* was the shutter of his apparatus. I must say that although he frightened me very much he never did me or mine any harm."



BABY SKYLARK'S FIRST PORTRAIT.

KIDNAPPED BY A SEAGULL.

THE EIDER DUCKLING'S NARROW ESCAPE.

AN old mother Eider Duck sat on her nest amongst the brown rocks and listened calmly to the sea churning and dashing on the rough beach below, whilst she waited for her last duckling to struggle from its shell.

Her other five dusky children kept on popping their heads from beneath her wings and saying :

“Oh, do let us get away down to the sea, mother. We are so anxious to have a dive in the nice cool water.”

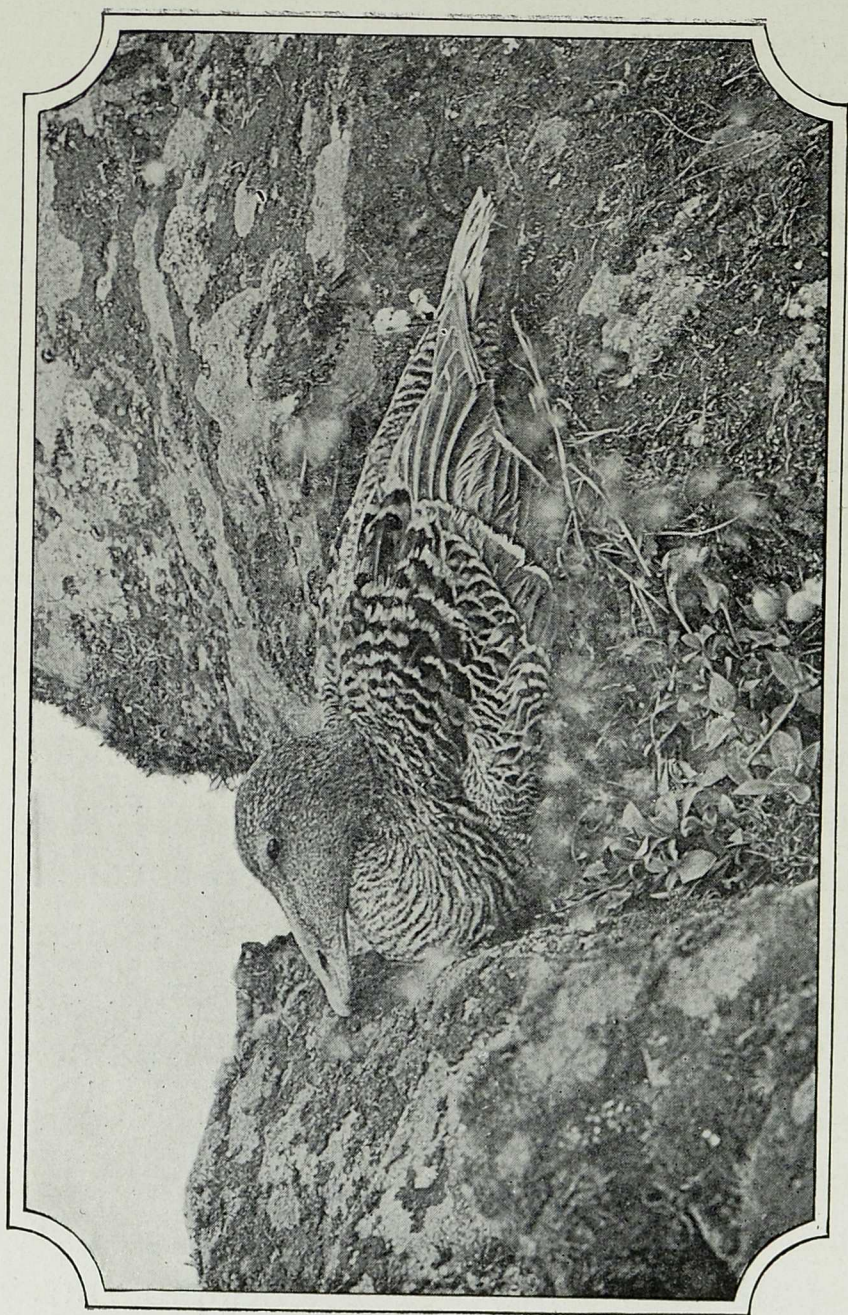
“Be patient, my dears, be patient. All things come to those who know how to wait. Your little sister Waddle-upon-the-Sand will be out of her shell in an hour or two, and while we wait for her I will tell you something that

may be both interesting and useful for you to know."

"That's right, mammy. Let us have a story," they all cheeped in their own peculiar language.

"Well," she began, "when I was a duckling three or four days old, I was playing, along with my brothers and sisters, in a little rock pool where our mother had taken us to feed. By-and-by your granny looked up and said, 'Come, children, we must be off. I see a couple of fishing boats bearing down upon our island to examine their lobster pots.' She waddled out of the pool and away round a weed-covered boulder, calling out, 'Come along, children; come along, come along.'"

"My brother, Dusky Diver by name, just then espied a little hermit crab peeping from a whelk-shell, and said to me, 'Oh, Sally, here's a joke! Let us pull this long-legged chappie out. We'll soon catch mother up.'"



“AN OLD MOTHER EIDER DUCK SAT ON HER NEST.”

(p. 156.)

“We stayed behind for a minute ; but do what we would, we could not get the crab to leave his house. So we rushed away after mother, whom we could hear calling in the distance. Unfortunately, we took a wrong turning in a great cleft of rock, and were soon hopelessly lost.

“I began to tremble and cry, for I had overheard two old Eider Ducks talking to each other about their lost children having been kidnapped and swallowed by Lesser Black Back Gulls.

“My brother said, ‘Oh, don’t cry, Sally ! We shall find mother directly. She can’t be far away.’ He had also heard something about the ways of our dreaded enemies, I doubt not, for he added under his breath, ‘If you happen to see a Lesser Black Back coming along, just slip under a stone or piece of seaweed as quietly and quickly as ever you can, and I will do the same.’

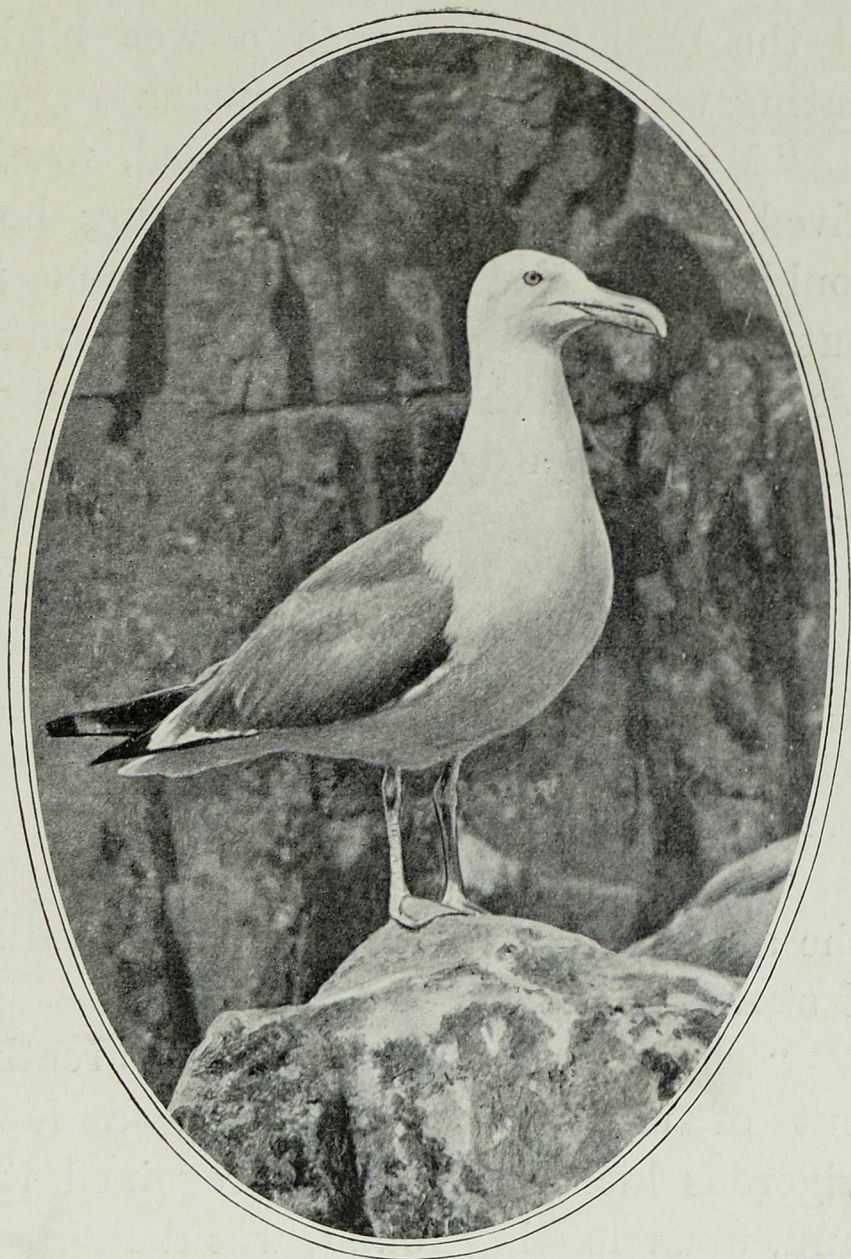
“He had hardly got the words out before there was a swish of wings and a great shadow overhead.

“‘To cover, to cover, quick, Sally!’ shouted Dusky Diver as he disappeared under a boulder. But I was far too frightened to stir. My poor legs gave way under me. I was helpless, and my heart beat with the wild terror of despair. I knew that I was doomed, and felt cross with my brother and the hermit crab.

“The Lesser Black Back instantly alighted, and, seizing me roughly by the neck, spread out his great wings, rose into the air, and commenced to fly from the island upon which I had been hatched to another about a mile away, perhaps intending that I should make a meal for his sitting mate.

“He had not flown far with me before a plucky little Ringed Plover gave chase.

“If the situation had not been so



THE LESSER BLACK BACK.

serious for me, I could have laughed at the bare idea of such a wee bird daring to attack such a monster.

“My captor wheeled, doubled, rose, dived, and, in fact, did everything he could think of to avoid his pursuer; but, try as he would, he could not escape her fierce onslaught. At last he tried to outfly her; but this was useless. She made a swift, upward dash at him, and drove her bill home on the under part of his body. The great coward yelled in rage and terror, and, dropping me, made off as hard as ever his wings would carry him.

“I fell down, down, down through the air, twirling round and round until I struck the sea *plop*!

“The blow knocked all the breath out of my body; but after a few vigorous kicks and flaps I regained it, and, upon looking round, was delighted to see my mother and brothers and sisters not far away.

“Poor old mother! She was pleased to see me swimming by her side again, and said it was a shame that father Eider Ducks didn’t stay at home and help to look after their children, instead of congregating on some rock or swimming in a sheltered bay together, talking over old times.”

“And what became of poor Dusky Diver, mammy?” enquired the ducklings.

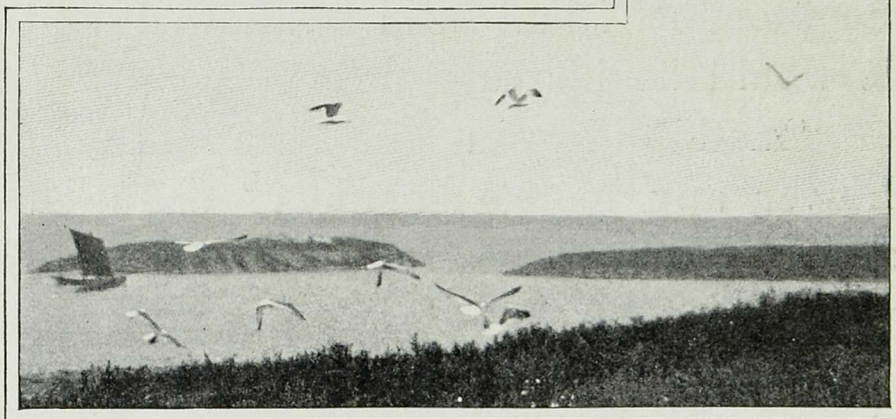
“Oh, we went back to look for him as soon as the lobster-catchers had lifted their pots and gone away. He was sitting under the boulder where he had gone to hide, crying because he thought I had been swallowed and it would be his turn next.”

“And did you see the Ringed Plover any more, mammy?” enquired someone, in a weak, squeaky, baby voice.

“Well done, little Waddle-upon-the-Sand! You are out of your shell

at last, then, and able to ask questions," said the old Eider Duck. "Of course we did, my dear. We went straight away to thank her for her wonderfully courageous delivery of me from death.

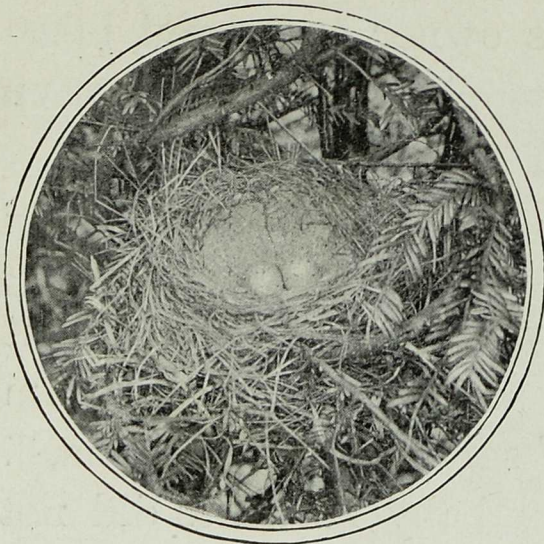
"Now, children, we'll all go down to the sea and have a swim. Remember, you must always rally round your mother and be guided by her advice. She is the best friend you will ever have, and your welfare is at all times her first thought."



LESSER BLACK BACKS ON THE WING.

CAGE SLAVES.

*A COUNTRY LAD, A NEST OF YOUNG
THRUSHES, AND A SHILLING.*



NEST OF SONG THRUSH.

FOUR hearty young Song Thrushes sat in their mud-lined home one showery April day and swallowed fat worms as fast as ever their

industrious parents could find and bring them along.

During the afternoon they became very sleepy, and their mother sat and covered them whilst they had a nap. She looked the very happiest Song Thrush in all the county of Surrey.

But, alas ! Mother-bird happiness is often of short duration, and her loving little heart was soon to be filled with the gravest anxiety.

A farmer's boy happened to pass that way almost immediately afterwards, and, his sharp eye detecting the nest, he frightened its owner away and lifted it down from its place to take a peep inside.

"As bonny a family of young Spotty-breasts as ever I see. Father is going up to London with a load o' hay next week, and I'll send you along o' him and get a bob," said he, half to himself.

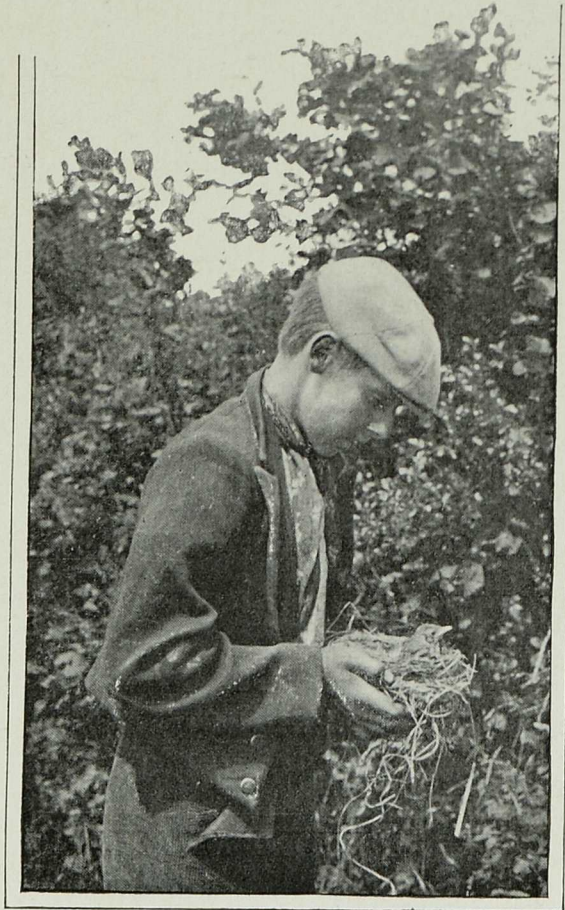
Of course, the baby Thrushes did not understand what he meant in the least, so asked their mother directly she came back.

The old bird listened attentively to all they had to relate ; but, instead of answering their questions, she only stood and stared in a bewildered sort of way on the edge of the nest until her

youngest son, little Tommy Hammer-a-Snail, thrust up his wee head and innocently enquired: "Where is London? And what is a 'bob,' mammy?"

This broke the gravity of her thoughts a little, and, smiling faintly at her chick's ignorance, she replied: "I will tell you some day, pet."

As soon as the father Thrush had arrived and distributed his catch of worms amongst his sons and daughters, his wife took



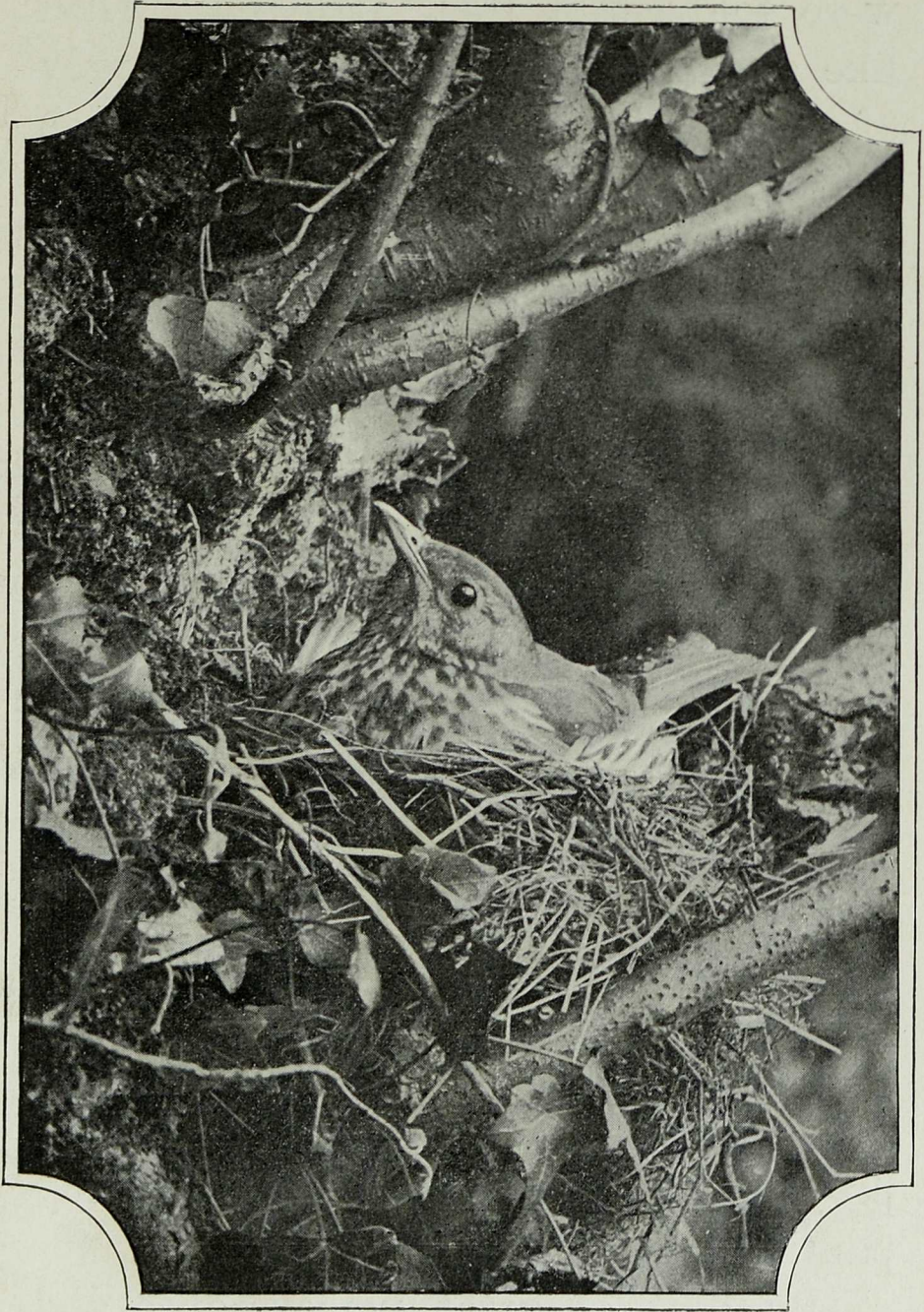
"LIFTED IT DOWN . . . TO TAKE A
PEEP INSIDE." (p. 166.)

him aside and they had a long, serious conversation.

“This is Friday, my dear, and the boy will most likely come back for them on Sunday afternoon, so that his father may take them to London when he starts out about one o’clock on Monday morning, with a load of hay,” the chicks overheard their father say. They did not catch their mother’s reply, but plainly heard her husband add: “We must feed them well and get them fledged by Sunday morning.”

The old birds returned to the nest together and said: “Now, children, we want you to swallow all the worms and grubs we bring you, and to flap your little wings and grow as strong as ever you can during to-day and to-morrow, for we intend to leave this place and go to live amongst the lovely trees in Birchwood next Sunday morning.”

The young Thrushes did as they



"THEIR MOTHER SAT AND COVERED THEM."
(p. 165.)

were told ; and their parents worked like slaves to find them a good supply of wholesome, strengthening food, so that by Saturday evening a fly could hardly get near the old nest on account of the breeze made by the wing flapping, which was both fast and furious.

“ I’m sure I can fly a bit ; mother will be pleased,” shouted young Gooseberry Jack, setting his wings in rapid motion.

“ That’s nothing,” chirruped his sister, Jenny Hop-and-Listen. “ Watch me !” and straightway set to work with such wild delight that she struck poor little admiring Tommy full upon the side of the face with one of her wings and knocked him clean over the edge of the nest, and he fell on to a projecting stump below, where he lay panting, half dead with fright.

By dint of great perseverance and sundry venturesome hoppings this way

and that, Master Hammer-a-Snail was able to get back, and lectured his sister severely for her carelessness when he succeeded in doing so.

When Sunday morning arrived, the young Thrushes couldn't fly a bit, but their parents enticed them to hop from twig to twig until they finally all fell to the ground, and had to be hidden away in a big bunch of thistles, not more than fifteen yards from their old home.

Their leaving early in the morning was a great piece of good luck, for the farmer's boy arrived before noon, and when he found the nest empty, flew into a great rage, tearing it to pieces, and exclaiming: "I knows who's lugged 'em. It's Waddling Willie. I only told him and half a dozen other chaps where they was. 'E's nailed 'em right enough, and I'll 'ammer 'im!"

In due season the young Thrushes

reached the glades of Birchwood in safety, and little Tommy again asked his mother where London was, and what a "bob" meant.

"London is a great, dreary forest of smoking chimney pots, beneath which millions of human beings live, in nests varying in size and beauty almost exactly according to what they call their worldly wealth, which means the amount of money they possess or can earn. A 'bob' is a round piece of silver money. It is called a 'bob' by the poor and vulgar, because they like to use short names that mean a lot; and a 'shilling' by the rich, because, as a rule, they love the correct thing, and have plenty of time in which to pronounce long words."

"That's very funny, mother; but what did the boy want his father to sell us for—to be eaten?"

"No, to make cage slaves, my child," said the old Thrush. "Human

beings call them cage pets, but we birds call them cage slaves."

"What is a cage slave or pet, then?" asked young Hammer-a-Snail.

"A wild bird put into a wood and wire prison-house about a foot square, and kept there until he dies, in the hope that some day he may forget his sad heart, and that he ever saw the sunlight dancing on the waving grass, or heard the wind rustling through the leaves on the forest trees, and sing a little."

"How very sad! The people who keep cage slaves must be cruel monsters, mother."

"No, that is the most strange thing about it. As a rule, they are just the opposite, and will, with some show of reason, argue that their cage slaves are 'as happy as the day is long,' and so forth, forgetful of the fact that for every wild bird that lives and thrives in a cage numbers of others have pined

and died under the attempt to tame them."

"Have you ever known any young Thrushes stolen for cage slaves, mother?" enquired the chick, sadly.

"Yes ; only last spring your father and I had the great grief of losing our whole family of five beautiful chicks."

"And did you ever hear what became of them?"

"I did. A town Sparrow came along in the summer time, when the corn was ripening, to get a breath of fresh air and a change of diet, and one day, while he was keeping watch for the farmer's boy with a gun, I got into conversation with him, and, curiously enough, he came from a place called Seven Dials, and was able to tell me something about the fate of my lost children.

"My little darlings were stolen by the same boy who made up his mind to take you, and sold by his father

to a man in a dark, smoky court. Although the man was rough and dirty, he was not unkind. Do what he would, however, one chick pined and died; another hanged itself between the cage bars; a third broke his leg, and had to be killed; a fourth was murdered by a dirty old street cat. The remaining member of the family lived to pipe a few sad notes when spring time came again, but he looked a poor, broken-hearted bird, with his tail feathers all frayed out at the ends, and bedraggled with dirt."

"What a shame!" ejaculated Tommy, in great indignation.

"But do only poor people, living in smoky courts, keep cage slaves?" he queried.

"Oh, yes, my dear, all sorts of people keep them—even those living in the country, with plenty of wild birds singing all round them, sometimes do so."

“Wouldn’t it be a lesson if we were strong enough to catch up and fly away with a few of their boys and girls to put in cages, mother? I expect it would bring home to them our side of the question, and they would give up making prisoners of innocent, harmless little birds.”

“They sin in ignorance, my dear. Some day they will know better; and, for the present, we must be thankful to all boys and girls, men and women, who try to prevent poor little wild birds from being made into cage slaves.”

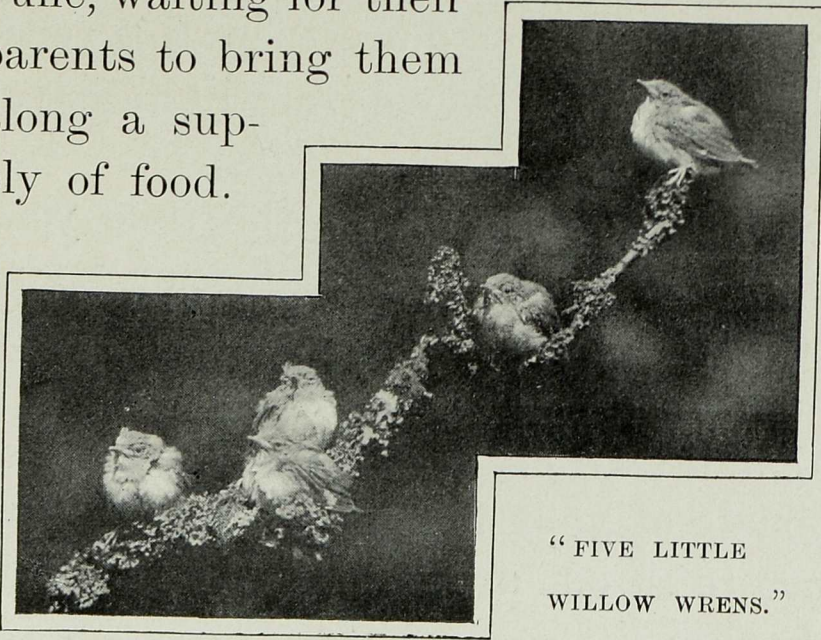


BABY THRUSHES IN BIRCHWOOD.

THE WEE WILLOW WREN AND THE BIG TROUT.

A FOE THAT LURKED UNSEEN.

FIVE little Willow Wrens sat on a dead, lichen-clad branch one sunny day in June, waiting for their parents to bring them along a supply of food.



"FIVE LITTLE
WILLOW WRENS."

Chirrupy Charlie, who sat lowest down, suddenly looked up towards his sister Betty Yellow-Breast, sitting at the very top, and said :

M

“Whatever did mother mean when she was talking about keeping away from the edge of Birkdale beck? Why, I’m quite sure I could easily scramble out of such an insignificant trickle if I happened to fall into it. What’s more, I hate being kept in the dark about anything, and unless mother gives me a very good reason why I should keep away, I am going down there this very afternoon, and of course you will all have to follow me.”

“Charles, my boy, by the time you are a month old, there will not be a tree in this wood tall enough for you to sit upon. Come up here, come up here and take my seat at once. A high estimate of your importance, and a low perch to sit on, are bound to make you unhappy.

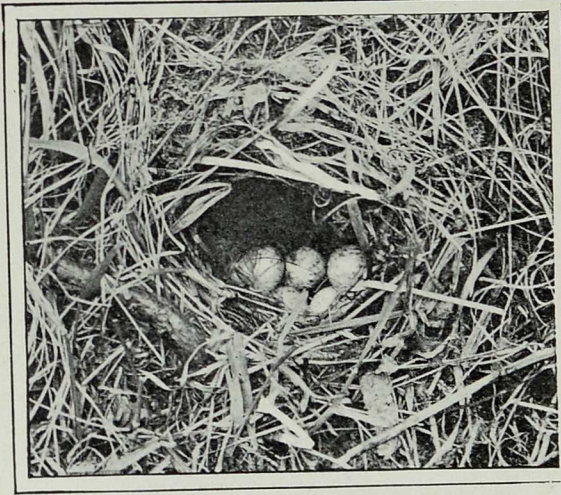
“Your tall talk about mother supplying you with reasons good or bad is laughable, and your threat just as cowardly.”

"ALIGHTED ON A
BRANCH."



"Thank you, Betsy ; you speak like a book written with vinegar," replied Charlie.

In a few minutes the mother bird came along, and after distributing a billful of small green caterpillars, alighted on a branch close by. Master Charles was still inquisitive, but his sister's little



“ ‘A NICE LITTLE DOMED HOUSE.’ ”

lecture had made him much more polite than he threatened to be, and instead of demanding, he coaxed his

parent into telling them why she did not wish her chicks to wander down by the beck.

“Last year,” she began, “a wee Willow Wren built herself a nice little domed house on the sloping bank of a trout stream. It was just like your late home, children, made of dead grass and moss outside, and lined with a plentiful supply of feathers. A more experienced mother bird would not have put it exactly where she did for two reasons. Firstly, a flood would be likely either to fill it with sand and mud, or

wash it away altogether; and secondly, her chicks when fledging would most probably 'step straight out of a warm feather bed into a cold, wet beck,' as a neighbouring Dipper put it. This is exactly what happened as a matter of fact, but unfortunately not quite all.

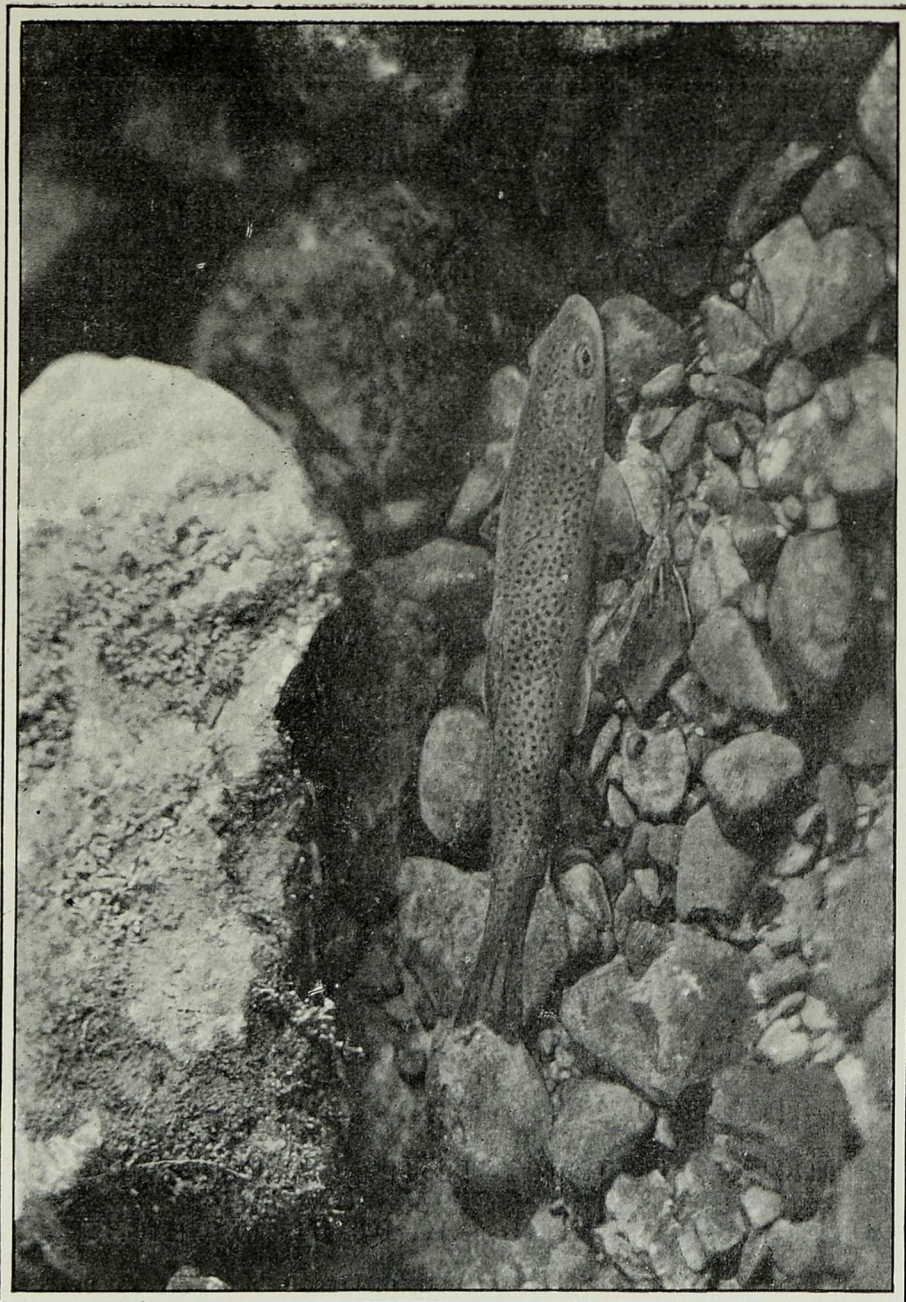
"Directly beneath the nest was a deep pool, and under the bank lurked, unseen and unsuspected by anybody, a savage foe.

"One day a Teal Duck took a swim down stream off the moors with her family of the brightest, sharpest little ducklings ever seen. They were just passing the Wren's home when a monster darted from his dark hole beneath the bank, and before the mother Duck quite realised what had happened, he sucked one of her children under water, and was off with it like a shot. The poor parent bird was in great distress. She cried out her alarm note, and churned up the water by flapping round and

round, whilst her ducklings fled in all directions, and hid beneath bits of moss hanging from stones, or whatever else they could find. Not knowing that the enemy was an under water creature, two or three dived, which was the worst thing they could have done if he had not been engaged in holding their wretched kinsman between his cruel jaws.

“The little Willow Wren saw all this, and shuddered when she thought of the perilous passage of her own children from the nest to the great world beyond the beck. The bigger they grew the unhappier she became, and at each feeding journey would say :

“‘Don’t wait for me on the edge of the nest, my dears, for fear you get a slip and roll into the pool below, for there’s a great brute watching out for you day and night in there, and he will swallow the first chick that falls. Remember the Teal duckling, and beware!’”



“ ‘ A GREAT, BIG TROUT. ’ ”
(p. 184.)

“In spite of all this, one venturesome chick thought she would just show her brothers and sisters how brave and clever she was, so stepped outside on to the edge of the nest and began to flap her little wings. She overbalanced herself, and down she rolled head over heels, and went *plop* into the pool.

“Poor child! She had scarcely risen to the surface before a huge snout showed itself dark and shiny through the water, and she was seized between two rows of sharp teeth and dragged under.

“Her poor mother arrived upon the scene just in time to see the chick roll down the steep bank and disappear.

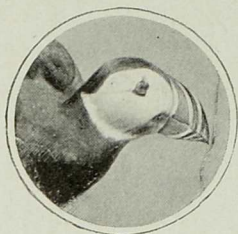
“The murderer was a great, big trout that had lived in that pool for many years, and I was the unfortunate little mother bird without experience.

“That is why I do not wish you to go near the beck, children, until you are older, stronger, and wiser.”

UNDERGROUND ROBBERY;

OR,

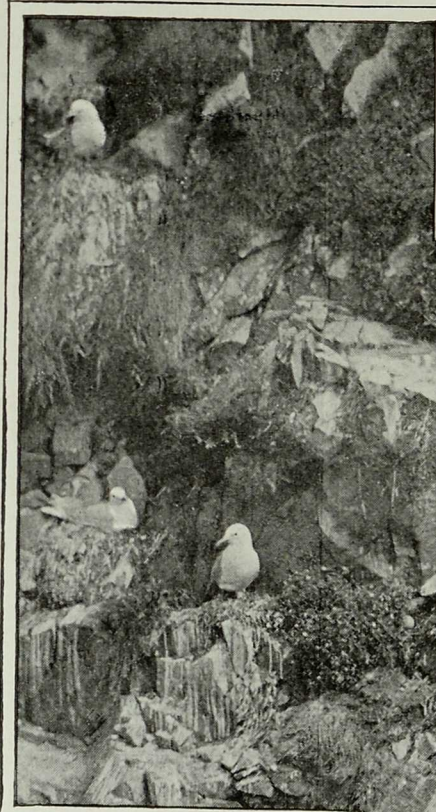
HOW LAZY PUFFINS STEAL INDUSTRIOUS RABBITS' BURROWS.



ONE bright, sunny morning in the merry month of May, three Puffins sat solemnly on a plank that had been washed off some timber ship during a storm, and enjoyed the restful, heaving swing of an oily smooth sea. They were under the lee of the Bass Rock, high on whose frowning crags sat innumerable female Kittiwakes, listening to their mates crying "Kitti-wake! Kitti-wake! Kitti-wake!" as they wheeled joyously round and round on their strong, black-tipped wings.

"Have you finished digging your

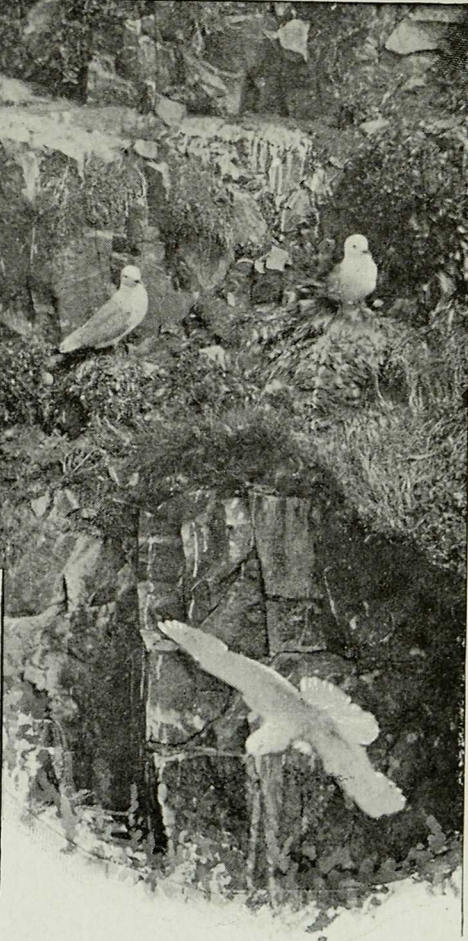
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“ INNUMERABLE
KITTIWAKES.”

(p. 185.)

nesting burrow,
Mrs. Coulter-
neb?” asked
one of the
birds.



“ Not quite,
Mrs. Tam O’Narrie,” replied her neigh-
bour. “ I am just hollowing out the
chamber at the end. How are you
getting on with yours, my dear ? ”

“Oh, I’m a long way behind. I have, unfortunately, met with one or two large stones in the peat and had to dig right round them, which has, of course, delayed me very considerably.”

The third member of the group, Mrs. Sea Parrot by name, suddenly burst out laughing, and continued to shake her sides with merriment until she rolled backwards off the plank into the sea.

This unseemly conduct annoyed the two elder birds very much, and when she regained a footing on the piece of timber, they enquired sarcastically whether she had had a fit.

Mrs. Sea Parrot apologised, and explained that she could not help laughing, because her neighbours were “so very old-fashioned.” “Why, my venerable friends,” she went on, “whatever need have you to dig burrows at all? Smart Puffins never trouble to do anything so menial and degrading now-a-days.”

The elder birds winked at each other slily, and enquired in mock earnestness whether new, up-to-date Puffins hatch their single eggs by carrying them under their wings, as the Great Northern Diver is supposed to do.

Mrs. Sea Parrot again laughed heartily at the foolishness of her friends, and went on in her innocent cleverness :

“No, no, but they have learnt a trick worth two of the old-fashioned way of digging a long tunnel in the ground. They just select an island whereon rabbits live, choose a suitable burrow, enter it when the owner is away, and, as possession is ten points of the law out of half a score in the breeding season, stick to it. I adopted this plan at the Farne Islands last year, and when Mrs. Bunny returned, coolly asked her what she was doing in my burrow.

“This naturally annoyed the old person very much, and she stamped and

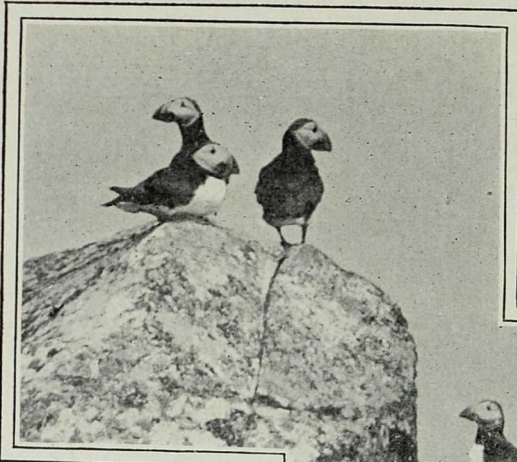
thumped with rage, but all to no purpose.

“‘Out you go,’ said I, sternly; and I wish you could have seen that ancient rabbit scampering in terror from her hole, with me hanging on to her short tail. It makes me laugh even now when I think about it, and I can fancy I hear the poor old thing screaming in her terror. She never came back any more to ask questions about the ownership of the burrow, and I reared my chick in it.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Coulterneb, gravely, “that may be what you call smart, but is it honest or neighbourly?”

“Oh, one hasn’t to trouble one’s head too much now-a-days about that when competition is so keen,” replied the young Puffin, off-handedly.

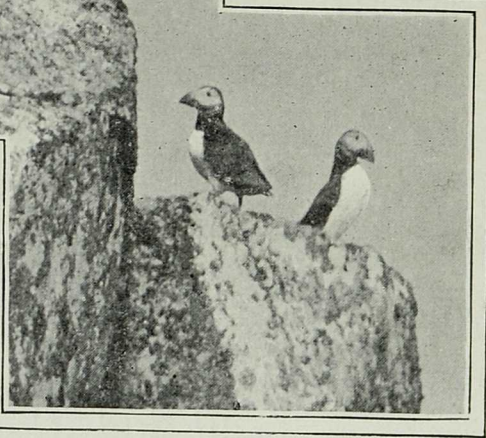
“No, may be,” remarked Mrs. Tam O’Narrie; “but I will tell you of something that happened to a lazy member of our family living on Ailsa



"THE EXPECTANT
PUFFINS ON THE
ROCKS SAT IN A
GROUP."

(p. 194.)

Craig, long before you were hatched, my young friend.



"Dishonesty

is not as you suppose, a new discovery made by smart, up-to-date young Puffins, but as old as the hills, and, in time, brings its own unpleasant rewards.

"Whilst living upon the awesome rock that rears its great grey head from the sea on the west side of Scotland, I had for a neighbour a clever, shallow bird, who openly boasted of the theft of rabbits' burrows season by season.

“She used deliberately to go out of her way to annoy the poor down-clad brutes, and one day did a very cruel thing.

“A wee baby bunny that had lost its mother, happened to wander into the tunnel in which this ill-tempered Puffin was sitting on her egg, to look for its parent, when she seized the poor wretch by the neck and strangled it before it could even cry out for help.

“The rabbits were naturally all up in arms about this wanton piece of cruelty, which was avenged in the most terrible way the following season.

“During the winter an old sailing ship struck the Craig in a gale of wind and went to pieces. A number of rats that lived in her managed to swim ashore and take up their quarters amongst the rabbits. This was a fatal thing for Puffindom.

“Back came the birds to their old haunts in the spring, and my boastful

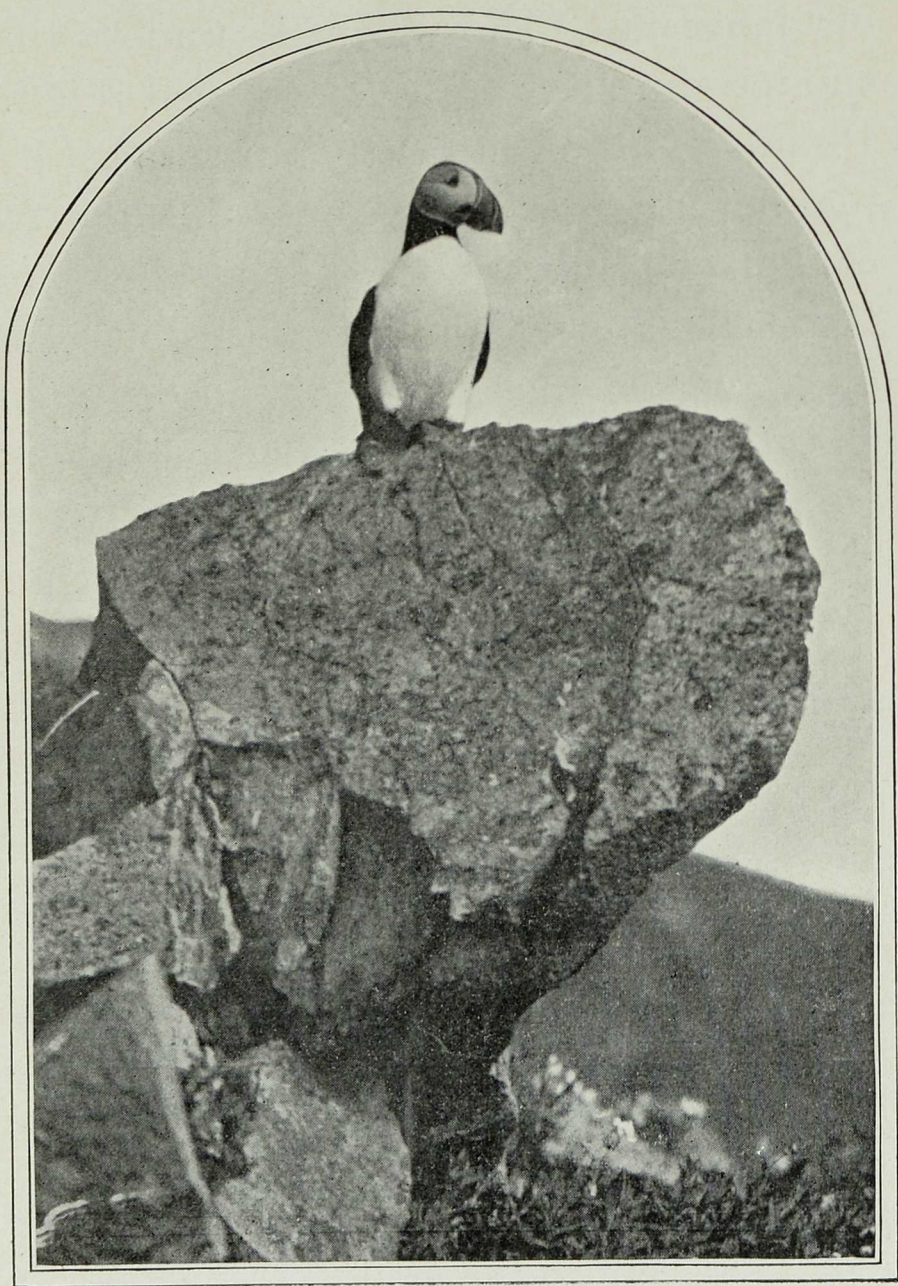
neighbour at length commenced to look out for a ready-made home. She not only found one, but a nice warm nest of straws already made at the end of it. She was greatly delighted at this, and rushed out to tell her friends, sitting about on the rocks around, the good news.

“ ‘Look out for some fun when Mrs. Bunny comes home, neighbours. The bagpipes will skirl in this burrow to-night, I know.’

“ Poor, foolish, dishonest bird ; she little thought what was in store for her.

“ In the evening the occupier of the hole returned. Mrs. Puffin lay low and said nothing, but chuckled to herself as she thought of the surprise in store for somebody.

“ As soon as ever the owner of the nest came close enough, she made a hard, sharp snap at her. This made the four-footed creature jump in amazement, and, being unable to guess



“MRS. FIFTH-OF-NOVEMBER-BILL.”

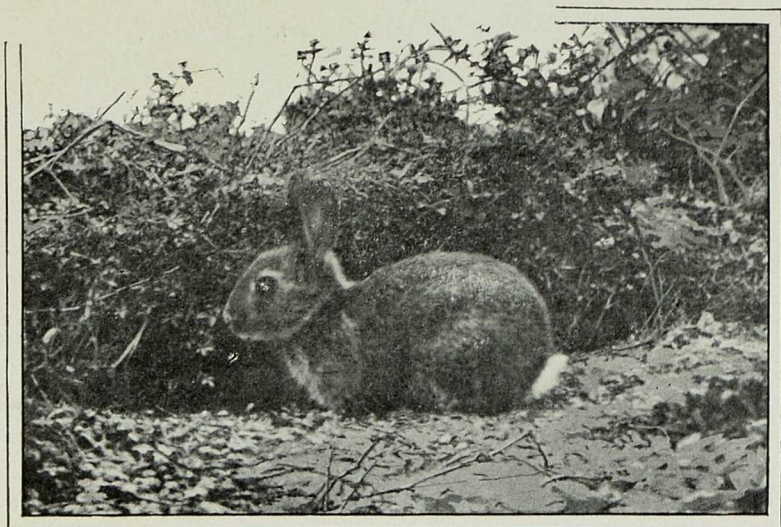
whatever could have taken possession of her nest, she turned under the sudden impulse of fear to flee. Mrs. Puffin followed up her advantage by making another snap, but oh! horror of horrors, instead of getting hold of the soft, downy tail of a rabbit she had seized the long, round one of a rat. Its owner squealed with the pain and sudden fright, but immediately recovering his nerve twirled round and said: 'Oh, that's your little game, is it, Mrs. Fifth-of-November-Bill? I'm hungry too! Rats and rabbits often share the same hole, and my friends have told me all about you and your bullying, dishonest ways.'

"A common rat is not exactly the right sort of animal to preach a sermon, but he can tell you from experience that people who walk through life by crooked paths are bound to stumble sooner or later.'

"The expectant Puffins on the rocks

sat in a group a long time, looking eagerly for some sign of their boastful neighbour's handiwork, but they never saw a rabbit come out of that tunnel, and their friend did not put in an appearance at the usual bathing place next morning.

“Guess what got her, and beware, my up-to-date young friend,” concluded Mrs. Tam O’Narrie.



“‘A WEE BABY BUNNY.’” (p. 19.)

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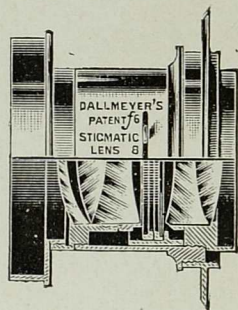
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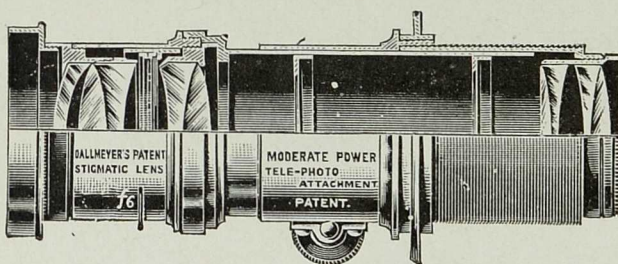
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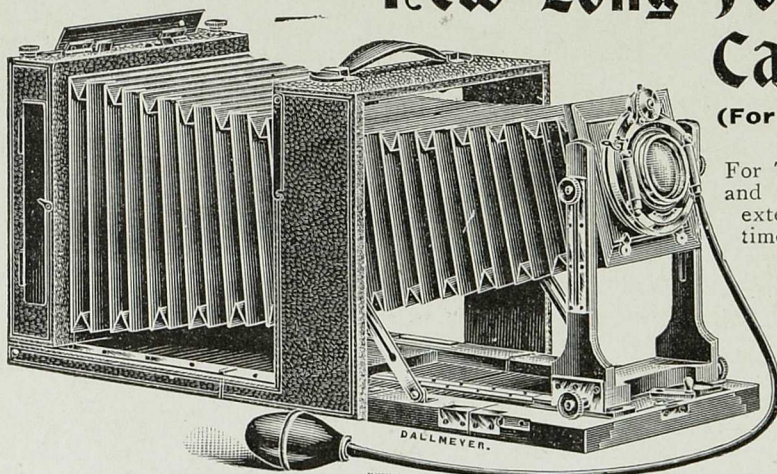
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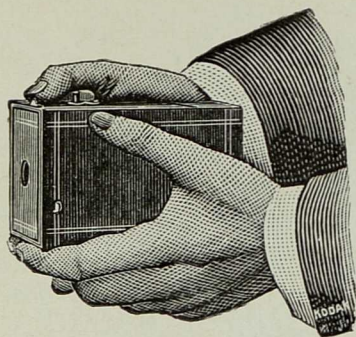


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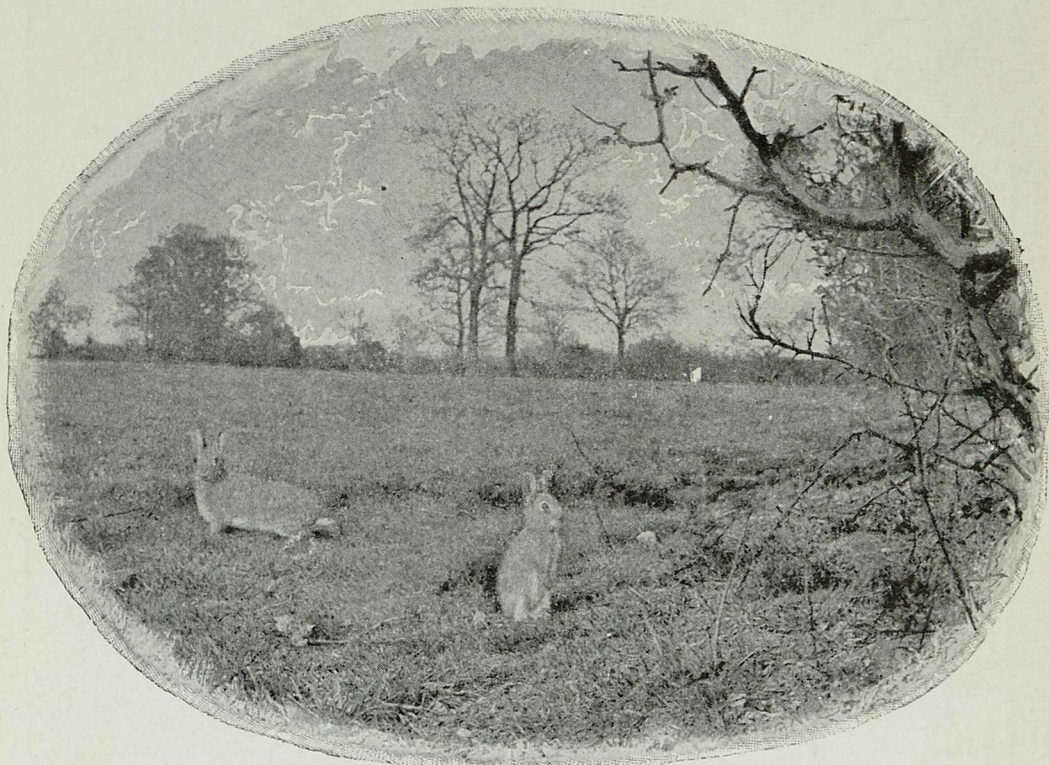
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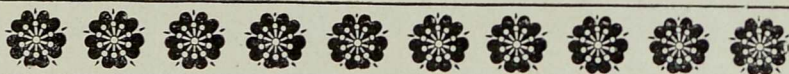
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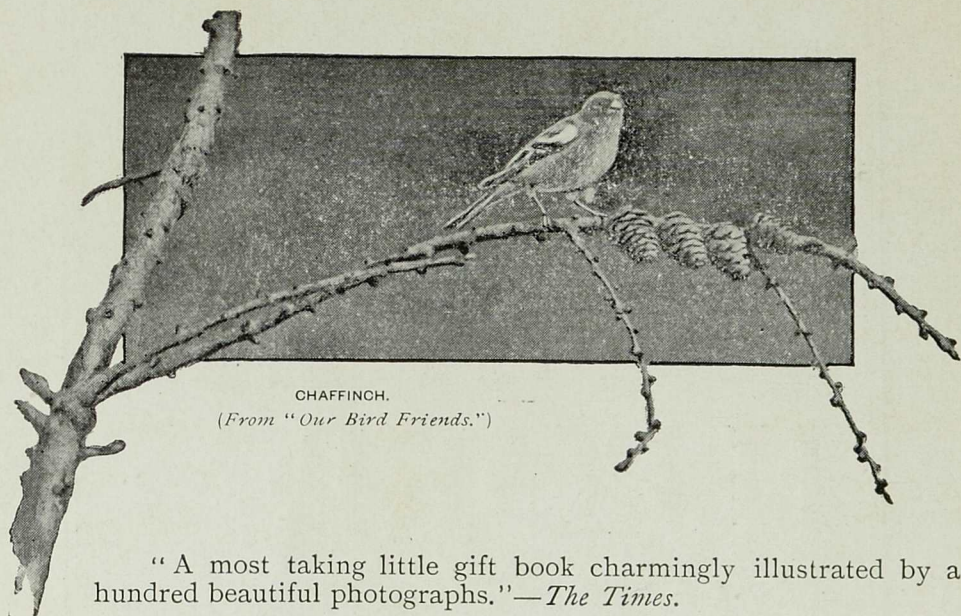
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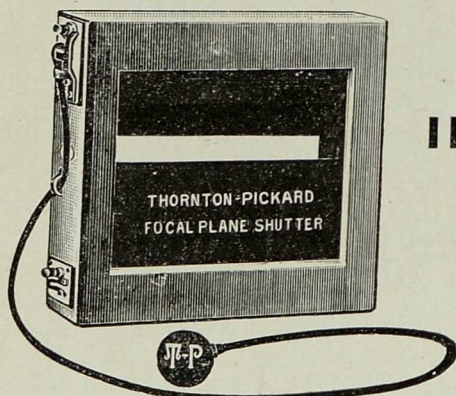
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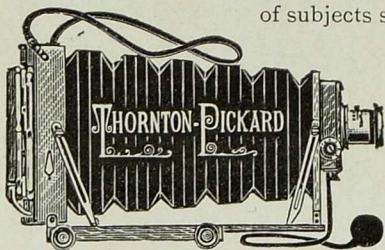
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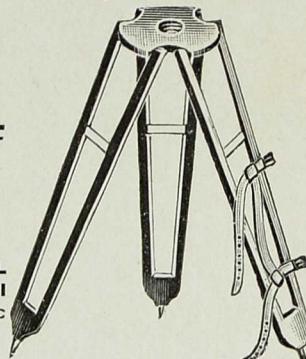
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