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THE OLD OAK TREE.

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**T**ELL us a story, please, dear Auntie; we want to hear the story you told us long ago about Cozie Cowl and Jerry, and all the rest of them.

So Aunt Mary, who dearly loves to please good little children, gathered them round her, and began the Story of

### THE OLD OAK TREE

AND ITS INHABITANTS.

ONCE upon a time, there was an Old Oak Tree in a gentleman's park; it grew beside a river, and stretched out its long strong arms, covered with thick green ivy, as if welcoming everybody to its shelter.

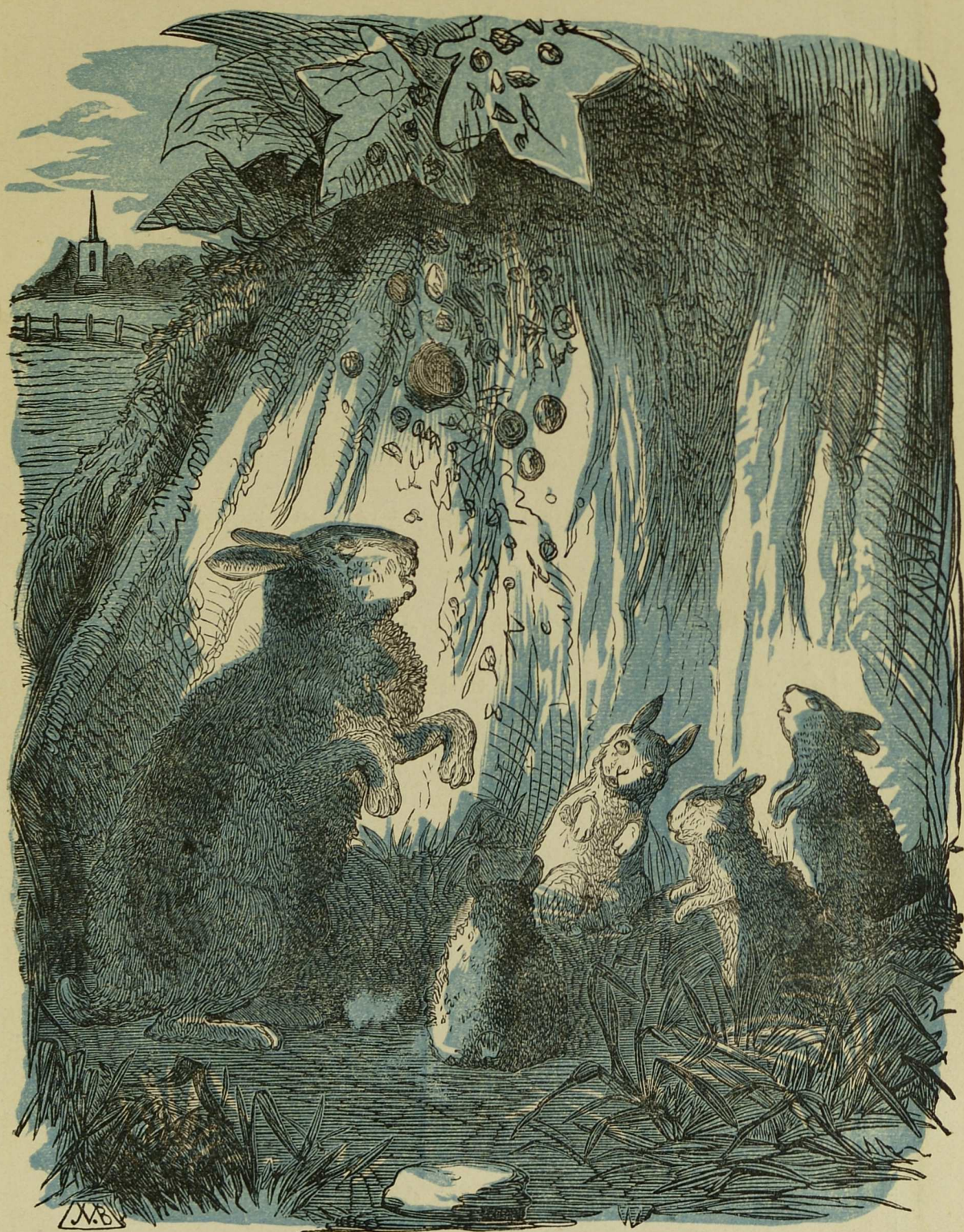


A number of animals took advantage of its invitation, and built their nests or dug out their holes or burrows within the shadow of the good old oak tree.

First, at the foot of it, lived Bunny, the Rabbit, with his wife Mrs. Bunny, and a fine family of sixteen children; there they ran in and out, up and down, cocking up their little white tails, and plunging into their hole as quick as lightning the moment they saw anybody coming.

Jerry, the Squirrel, who lived high up in the tree, used to look down and pity Mr. Bunny very much, he was "so poor and had such a large family, and had not so much as a single nut laid up for provision against winter." But Bunny knew better; and when he and Mrs. Bunny, and all the little merry gray Bunnies, were safe and snug and warm in their hole, all huddled up together so warm on a winter night, when, the wind blowing, they used to look up at the great swinging branches, and say, "Poor Jerry! how cold he must be up there! and so dull,





The Bunnies at the Foot of the Tree.



with nobody to speak to! we would not like to be in Jerry's place!"

You see they each had their own way of being happy. And you would have thought Jerry's was a very pleasant one, if you had seen him in autumn, running about so merrily among the falling leaves; he was a pretty sprightly little fellow, with a tail that might have made a boa for your neck, it was so warm and bushy; and when he was cold, on the winter nights, he made a boa of it himself, and wrapt himself round with it, and fell sound asleep.

Below Jerry's house, just where the ivy was thickest, lived our friend Cozie Cowl, the Owl,—dear old round-face Cozie Cowl,—how funny he looked in the day time, half awake, with his wise nose and his great yellow eyes staring out of the ivy so sleepily! But in the night who was so merry as Cozie Cowl? Then was his time to come forth, with his wife and his two daughters, who were just like two little puffy balls of feathers. He kept a singing school at night; and when all the other



birds were sleeping, you might hear old Cozie Cowl and the Misses Cozie Cowl all singing "Tu whit! Tu whoo!" till they roused their cousins, the White Owls, on the other side of the river; and, all together, they made such a noise with their singing school, that you would have thought the trees of the wood were laughing at you.

Among the thick ivy there were some smaller inhabitants; there were a Robin Redbreast, a pair of Blackbirds, and two lovely little Tomtits. Also there was a noisy family of Jackdaws, Mr. and Mrs. Kay by name, in a hole in the trunk, which they called Heart-of-Oak Hall; and highest of all, near the top of the tree, lived a quiet, solitary industrious old fisherman, called Longlegs, the Heron.

Most peaceably and comfortably they all lived together, always polite and neighbourly to each other when they met. The birds sung their best songs, and when the Squire passed, he used to look round and say, "there is not a tree in all my grounds so full of music as THE OLD OAK TREE."





Jerry the Squirrel, and the Cozie Cowl Family.



## QUARRELS AND PUNISHMENT.

ONE day, a pair of new comers came to our Old Oak Tree, and after looking well about them for a good place, began to settle themselves and build their nest. Mr. and Mrs. Jay, for that was their name, were most beautiful birds, with crests on their heads, and pretty blue feathers on their wings; but they were pleasanter to look at than to listen to, for their voices were so loud and sharp, that they seemed to be always scolding.

They were full of curiosity about their neighbours, and peeped into everybody's house, instead of their own. "Why do you live down there? Mr. Bunny," said Mrs. Jay; "I am sure your house must be very damp, and unhealthy for your children; if you would take my advice, you would never remain contented with such a miserable hole as that." And poor Bunny, who had been very happy before, began to think that what such a fine fashion-



able neighbour told him, must be true, and he hung down his ears and said, "Well, it is damp, I must look out for another."

Then they attacked Cozie Cowl: "If you would only keep decent hours, and come out at the proper time of day, Mr. Cozie Cowl, it would do you a world of good; there you shut yourself up, and sleep all the best part of your life away in your corner, when you might enjoy the sunshine." And I am sorry to say, our friend Cozie, with all his wisdom, was so silly as to believe them, and opened his big yellow eyes and came tumbling out of his hole among the ivy. Very foolish he looked, as he appeared in the daylight half asleep and blinded with the sunshine; and this was the very thing the mischievous Jays wished, and they laughed at him, and pecked at him till he crept into his corner again.

"As for you, Jerry," said Mrs. Jay, "I do not believe you are a bit happy all alone up there; you lead but a scrambling sort of life; why don't you marry Miss Hedgehog, and set up house comfort-



ably?" But Jerry did not like the notion of Miss Hedgehog in his soft wee housie, and grinned with his teeth and chattered so at Mrs. Jay, that she got into one of her passions, and flew at him, with her crest raised, till he had to run into his hole.

I could not tell you all the quarrels that these two naughty birds raised in the tree. They made everybody feel uncomfortable, and taught those who had been all so contented before to despise their own houses and their homely life. At last, instead of sweet songs, there was nothing but complaints and screams, and loudest of all, the sharp harsh cries of Mr. and Mrs. Jay, heard from the tree.

One day, the Squire and the Lady and their Children, came past. "What disagreeable noise is that which I hear: O, I see now, it is the jays in that Oak: what pretty birds!" "Very pretty, my dear," said her husband; "but most insufferably noisy, we must get rid of them." And before night, a gun went bang!—and again bang!—and down went Mr. Jay and Mrs. Jay, with all their fine



feathers and their quarrels. And they were stuffed and placed in the Squire's hall. And thus was peace restored to the OLD OAK TREE.

### AN EVENT.

ONE morning, as Mrs. Bunny was sitting at her door, she was surprised by a quantity of nutshells coming tumbling down on the top of her head; she put back her long ears, and looked up in amazement to see what this could be, when down came another flight of nutshells, rattling about her little pink nose, and far above she saw Mr. Jerry, the Squirrel, very busy sweeping out his house with his tail!

"What are you doing up there? Jerry," said she. "Just putting my house in order, Madam, if you have no objection!" and again he swept away, till another fall of rubbish made Mrs. Bunny fairly run into her hole. She wondered much over this, for Jerry never used to keep his house neat, and she





The death of the Jays.



wondered still more when she saw him, after he had finished his work, clean himself very nicely, and wash his face, like a cat, and then run down the tree and away into the woods nobody knew where.

But Jerry knew very well what he was about, and that very evening, when the sun was setting, and the daisies had closed, and the blackbird was singing his good-night, and all the Bunnies were taking their supper, Jerry came back, and with him a pretty little bright-eyed, long-tailed Mrs. Jerry! Don't you think he did quite right to put his house in order?"

### GAIETY AND GOSSIP.

ALL our friends in the Tree were very happy that Jerry had got such a nice little wife, for he was a favourite with everybody; and in honour of the event, Mr. and Mrs. Cozie Cowl determined to give a grand tea-party. It was difficult to fix upon a good hour, because, if it was during the daylight, Cozie



Cowl himself would be sure to fall asleep; and if it was at night, every one else would sleep. So Mrs. Cozie, with her usual wisdom, fixed on the twilight hour, between the day and the night, on a pleasant evening, when the moon would rise soon and serve them for a lamp; and she prepared her feast in a very convenient place, on the lowest branch of a spreading horse-chestnut tree, that swept the ground close to our famous Oak; it was low enough for the beasts, and not too low for the birds of the party.

What a nice feast she prepared for them! The best of nuts, acorns, and beech masts, for Jerry and his wee wife; beautiful dandelions, for the Bunny family; pretty speckled trouts, for Longlegs, the Heron; grubs and grains, for the Jackdaws; and lovely fat worms, for the Blackbird and Robin Red-breast; while for Cozie himself, she got the very thing in the world he liked best,—a particularly nasty dead mouse! There never was a merrier party; they sat at table a long time, talking of many things, and at last they began to talk about their





Robin Redbreast and the Gardener.



great neighbours and masters, who lived in the Squire's big house hard by.

"In my opinion," said Robin Redbreast, "the Squire's gardener is one of the best and kindest men I know; I have been with him all day, and he has been digging up worms for me ever since six o'clock this morning."

"But what do you think of the kindness of the Lady herself?" said Bunny; "I heard her order him to fill her flower border with carnations and pinks, my own favourite food: how we shall enjoy them when they come up!" And he looked at the sixteen little Bunnies, and they all wagged their long ears.

"I know," said the Blackbird, "that the gardener has the very best kinds of cherries in this part of the country; I am sure I am much obliged to him." "And I," said Jerry, "am much obliged to the Squire for the acorns he plants for me."

"And we are all much obliged to him," said Kay, the Jackdaw, "to him, and to the people of Marketborough, for the telegraph wires that they



have put up for us to sit upon." "Yes," said Mrs. Kay, "but don't you think we may thank the Marketborough people still more for the Church steeple that they have put up for us to sit upon? of course, it must have been put up for us only, as the town people say it is no use to them for sitting upon; and it is too ugly to have been put there for an ornament to the town."

"Very kind of them, very thoughtful," said every body; and Mrs. Plowter, the Water rat, proposed to drink the health of the people of Marketborough; but old Cozie Cowl shook his head: "My friends," said Cozie, "I am afraid you know nothing about it. If you flew about at night, and knew as much as I do, you would have very different ideas of the kindness of men. Did I not hear the gardener ordered to shoot the Blackbirds, who ate the cherries? Did I not see him set a trap for the Rabbits? Have not I seen the Kays' nests pulled out of the steeple? Did I not hear the Lady say, she would like to have you, Jerry, my boy, running round the treadmill in



her Squirrel cage? But, after all, I don't myself understand about the telegraph wires; they must have been put up for the Birds to rest upon." By this time, Cozie was wide awake, and favoured them with a song; after which they all took leave and went home.

### DISASTER AND DESTRUCTION.

THE Kays were not pleasant birds to have for neighbours. They were always grubbing and pecking in Heart-of-Oak Hall, till they made the hole far too large to be quite good for the Tree. Then, the river that flowed beside it under the bank, worked away among its roots, and loosened it where it leaned over; till one day, the Squire, as he came past, said to his wife, "That tree must be cut down; it leans so over the river, that I fear the first flood may carry it away."

"Bunny with his long ears heard this, and it put him in a sad fright. He ran directly to tell



Jerry, and Jerry agreed with him that it was a very great risk for them to remain; so he ran up the tree and down the tree, to warn everybody. Longlegs flew off directly; so did Blackbird and Robin; Mrs. Plowter, the Water rat, recommended a nice clean lodging to the Bunnies; Jerry and his wife betook themselves to the horse-chestnut tree; Cozie Cowl and all the Cozies just waited till it was dark enough for them to see, and then they too flew away to another shelter.

But the Kays would not be warned. "We have lived here always, and we are not going away now; the Squire would never think of cutting down such a tree as this: it has stood for hundreds of years, and it is likely to stand for a hundred more." "But I heard him order it to be cut down; the woodmen are coming to-morrow," said Bunny. "Nonsense," cried all the Jackdaws, with their sharp voices, "you are always so easily frightened, poor Bunny. Such a tree never was cut down in this park, and never will be!"





The Old Oak Tree prior to its fall.



And the Tree was not cut down, but something quite as bad happened. That very night, the wild west wind rose, and blew its strongest blast. The rain fell in torrents, till the river came down in top flood; and all the trees of the wood creaked and groaned; but our Tree, the noble Old Oak Tree, gave a heavier groan than all the rest,—crash,—dash,—splash,—down, down he went, Kays and all, into the river, and the flood carried them all away.

This is the end of the Story of the OLD OAK TREE.







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