



THE FOX AND THE HEDGEHOG.

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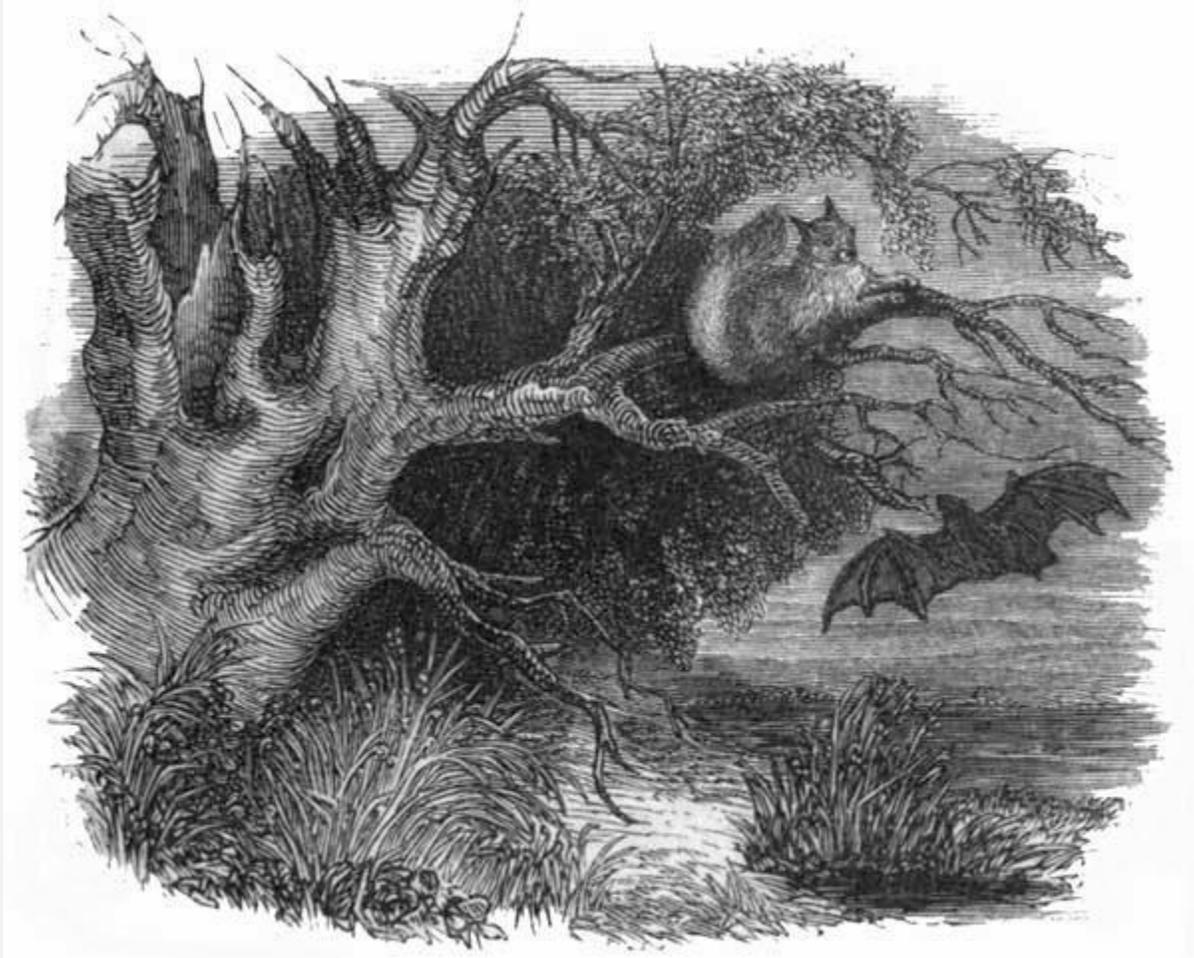
THE SQUIRRELS

AND

OTHER ANIMALS;

OR,
ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE HABITS AND INSTINCTS OF MANY OF
THE SMALLER BRITISH QUADRUPEDS.

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THE SQUIRRELS

AND
OTHER ANIMALS.

CHAPTER I.

"Bless me, I do believe I have been asleep!" said a squirrel, one fine morning in early spring, when the delicious warmth of the sun had reached him in his winter retreat, and roused the lazy little fellow from a two months' nap. The truth is, that he and his family had fallen asleep at the first setting in of the cold weather, and had passed the dismal winter in a state of profound repose, except, that, during a warm day or two in January, they had roused themselves for a short time, and eaten a few nuts and acorns from their winter store.

"Yes, I have certainly been asleep," said the squirrel, "and I fancy I have had a pretty long nap too. Well, I declare, my lazy wife and children are lying there still, curled up like so many dead things! Hallo, Mrs. Brush! come, get up and eat some breakfast. Here is the sun shining in most gloriously at the mouth of the hole, and I hear the blackbird's merry whistle in the grove below. Ah! they wont move, so I'll have a run this fine morning, and see how the world looks now. Perhaps when I come back they may be awake."

So Master Brush went to the entrance of his nest, which was situated at a great height from the ground, in a commodious hollow of a magnificent oak-tree.

"Oh joy!" he exclaimed, when he had looked around him for half a minute, "I see those delicious buds are beginning to sprout. Nobody can tell how I long for some fresh green food again! Nuts and acorns are all very well, but then they are *terribly dry*. Here goes for a leap, then!"



THE SQUIRREL.

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So saying, the active little fellow sprang from his hole, and if you had seen him, you would have thought that no animal without wings could have ventured upon such a leap without being dashed to pieces upon the ground. But Brush had nothing to fear; for though he had no wings, he knew that his beautiful bushy tail, and his legs, stretched out straight from his body, would bear him up in the air, and prevent his falling too heavily. Then he had very strong legs for his size, especially his hind legs, and his claws were so sharp and hooked, that he could skip along the boughs, without the least danger of falling off, and he could even run up and down the perpendicular trunks of trees, almost as easily as we can walk upon the level ground.

So when Brush leaped from the entrance of his hole, instead of falling to the earth, he pitched lightly upon a bough of the tree a long way below him, and ran along it for a

short distance. Then he leaped to another bough still lower, from the end of which, he very easily reached the next tree, and so on, from tree to tree, till he found himself in a well-known grove of young larches, at some distance. Here he immediately fell to work, nibbling the fresh green buds and tender bark. He sat upright, as squirrels generally do when they are eating, using his fore-feet as hands to hold his food, and very pretty he looked. But I think, that, if the gamekeeper had seen him injuring the young trees, ¹ he would not have been very well pleased, and perhaps he would have put his gun to his shoulder and shot poor little Brush, if he had not received orders to the contrary. For though his master knew that the squirrels injured his young trees sometimes, he would not allow them to be killed.

This gentleman had a particular reason for protecting the squirrels in his woods. One day the gamekeeper shot a very fine one, and brought it up to the house as a present for his master's little daughter Jane, who was confined with a disease from which she never recovered. At first, the child was pleased with her new plaything, but her tender heart was pained when she saw its beautiful eyes becoming dim, and recollected that, perhaps it had left in its nest some young ones, that were perishing for want of its care. Her grief was increased by fancying that, as the animal had been killed on purpose for her, she had been the cause of its death, and though her parents said all they could to comfort her, they could hardly make her believe that she was not to blame; for when people are very ill they often have strange fancies.

Poor little Jane died a few days after, and almost the last words she spoke were, "Papa, don't let Harvey kill any more squirrels." Her father carefully attended to this request of his darling little girl—his only child—the joy of his heart—and though, like most country gentlemen, he was exceedingly angry if any person stole his game, I believe he would rather have lost fifty pheasants or hares than one squirrel. *And so would I*, had I been poor little Jane's papa!

But we must not forget Master Brush, who has been seated all this time in the larch-plantation, making a famous meal upon the aromatic buds and tender bark. "Ah!" said he to himself, "if those lazy creatures in the nest yonder did but know what delicious food there is here!" Then he continued munching and skipping about the trees for some time longer. But presently the weather began to change. The sun hid his glorious face behind dark clouds; a fierce easterly wind whistled through the trees; a cold driving rain came on, and winter seemed to be returned again.

"Oh, dear me," said Brush, "this will never do! I don't like this sort of thing at all! the nest is the best place I declare."

When he reached his own tree, he was obliged to ascend to his nest by a different way, for squirrels cannot leap up to any place that is very far above them; so he ran along the

ground for a little distance, to the bottom of the oak, which was surrounded by a very close thicket of brambles.

In this thicket lived several families of dormice, who were Brush's relations, and the waggish squirrel called out to one of them as he passed, "Hallo, cousin Gotobed! The summer is almost over. If you don't make haste, all the nuts and acorns will be gone!" But there was no possibility of making his cousin Gotobed hear; for you must know, that a dormouse is a very sleepy little fellow indeed; even more so than a squirrel.

Brush was soon in his own warm nest, where he found all his family safe, and sound asleep, as he had left them. This nest, as I have mentioned, was made in a hole in the upper part of a very large oak-tree, and was almost as dry and warm as any bedroom in our houses. It was lined with dry leaves and soft moss, and in another part of the hole, which was large enough for five or six squirrels' nests, there was a great heap of nuts, acorns, and beechmast, which the careful Brush and his family had collected in the autumn.

Besides this stock of food, there were two more hoards, hidden in holes in different parts of the tree for the cunning squirrels thought, that, if some thief should wish to rob them of their treasures, he would not be very likely to discover all three of their storehouses.

If it were not for this large stock of provisions, the poor squirrels would be starved to death, in very mild winters, because then they do not sleep so much, and fresh food cannot be procured.

When Brush was in his comfortable nest, safe from the cold wind and rain, though he had almost filled his stomach with young buds, he thought he would try one of his nuts, just to see how they had kept through the winter. Holding the nut in his hands, his sharp teeth soon gnawed through the shell, and when he had reached the kernel, the dainty little fellow would not eat a bit till he had carefully removed every particle of the dry brown skin from it.

"A very sweet nut, I declare," said he, "nuts are not to be despised, after all. Dear me, I think I feel rather sleepy again! Nuts are not bad things, but as I was saying before, rather dry, when one has nothing else. But really I am very sleepy. 'Tis either the cold wind, or the famous breakfast I have made, I suppose;—very sleepy—indeed,—upon—my—word."

The last words sounded exactly as your voice would, if your head was covered up under the bed-clothes. The truth is, that, while Brush was talking to himself, he had gradually changed his position from sitting upright to lying down on his side. Then he slowly rolled himself up into a round ball, with his head and back closely covered by his

beautiful tail. This served him famously for a blanket, and so we may say, that his last words were really spoken *with his head under the bed-clothes*.

By way of filling up the time till the fine weather returns, and our sleeping friend uncurls himself again, I will give you a very short description of another sort of squirrel, which lives in the woods of America, and is even a much better leaper than ours. It is called the flying squirrel, though that is not a very proper name, for it cannot really fly; I mean that it cannot raise itself from the ground, like a bird can. But it can leap to a surprising distance, for besides a large bushy tail, it has a very curious membrane, or skin, on each side of its body, reaching from the fore to the hind leg. So when the flying squirrel leaps, it stretches out this skin as wide as possible, and as the air bears it up, it appears almost to *fly* from one tree to another. Travellers who have seen them, tell us that when a number of them leap at the same time, they appear, at a distance, like leaves blown off by the wind.

1 I should be sorry to bring a false accusation against the squirrels, the most beautiful and entertaining of all the British quadrupeds. But the whole truth must be told. They *do* occasionally injure young trees by feeding on the buds and bark; and a relation of mine, who has an estate in the West of England, informs me that his plantations have suffered considerably from their attacks. In his woods, squirrels are unusually abundant, and in consequence their depredations are the more evident. But, generally speaking, these animals are not sufficiently numerous to cause any serious injury to our plantations, and the pleasure they afford us by exhibiting their wonderful leaps and feats of agility among the summer branches, more than repay us for their very trifling thefts.

CHAPTER II.

After several days of cold wintry weather, the sun burst through the clouds again, calling into life plants, and insects, *and squirrels*. Brush and his wife, and their three children, who were born the preceding summer, and had lived with their parents through the winter, were all awake and enjoying themselves again. How they frolicked and

chased each other about from tree to tree, and played at hide-and-see among the branches! You would have thought that they had laid wagers with each other, who should venture upon the most difficult and dangerous leaps.

Then what feasting there was upon buds and young bark! and though this fresh green food was very nice as a change, still they all seemed to agree with our friend Brush, that nuts and acorns were not to be despised neither.

Once or twice the gamekeeper gave the young squirrels a terrible fright by shouting to them, when they were making free with the tender bark of his master's trees; but their parents told them, as they had often done before, that there was nothing to fear from Harvey, nor from his frightful looking gun. I hope you have not forgotten who it was that had saved the lives of so many squirrels. But if Harvey's frolicsome young spaniels, Flora and Juno, had met with one of our friends at a distance from any tree, I am afraid it would have been a bad business, for squirrels cannot run very fast on the ground, and their bushy tails seem rather in the way there. And the cunning little animals appear to know this, for though they sometimes come down to the ground, you will very seldom see them at any great distance from a tree.

A few days after the squirrels roused themselves from their long winter sleep, their cousins, the dormice, in the thicket at the foot of the tree, opened their sleepy eyes at last, and came out of their nests. But when they were once thoroughly awake, their eyes did not look sleepy at all, but on the contrary, were most beautifully bright and dark, and rather large for the size of the animal.



THE DORMICE.

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I call the dormouse a relation to the squirrel, ² because in some respects, he is really very like him, though at first sight you would not think so, and would perhaps say, that he was very little different from a common mouse, except in being rather fatter, and of a prettier colour. But his tail, though not nearly so large and bushy, is something like the squirrel's, and not at all like that of the mouse, which is almost entirely bare of hair, and in my opinion, has a very ugly and disagreeable appearance. The tail of the dormouse is handsome, and useful also, for when he sleeps he curls it over his head and back, to keep him warm and comfortable. Then in his habits he resembles the squirrel, for like him he can climb trees well, though he cannot leap very far, and he likes to dwell in the shade and retirement of the pleasant woods, far from the habitations of man. Here he generally makes his nest, which is composed of moss and leaves, in the thickest parts of bushes or underwood, and he lays up a winter store, like the squirrel.

Dormice are such sociable little creatures, that several families are sometimes found living close together, like those that had chosen their habitations at the foot of our squirrel's great oak-tree. Perhaps before I have finished this tale I may have something more to tell you about little Gotobed, the dormouse.

Do you suppose that Brush and his family spent the whole of the summer in frolicking and feasting? No, indeed! for even squirrels have work to do, and duties to perform. So, after a few days spent in the merry way I have described, one afternoon, when their children were gone on an excursion to the larch-grove, Mr. and Mrs. Brush perched themselves up on the topmost branch of their own oak-tree, and had some very serious conversation together. At least, they meant that the conversation should be serious; but Brush was such a merry waggish fellow, that he seldom could talk very long upon any subject without a laugh or a joke.

"Well, my dear," he began very gravely, "this is the third family you and I have seen playing around us. For three years we have lived happily together in this old oak, and a finer tree or a more comfortable nest than ours I do not believe can be found in the whole world."

Here in the gaiety of his heart he darted off to a neighbouring bough, and after performing a few strange antics for his companion's amusement, he was again perched up by her side, and went on with his speech.

"Three years," continued he, "yes, I declare, it is three years since I persuaded you to have nothing more to say to that tiresome old fellow Bigtail, and to take me for a companion instead."

"Come, come, you rogue," said his wife, "if this is the serious conversation you wanted to have with me, you may as well hold your tongue."

"Ha! ha!" he proceeded without attending to the interruption, "ha! ha! I remember that conceited old fellow Bigtail, and how you preferred him to me, because his tail was the least bit in the world longer than mine. I made him ashamed of his fine tail though at last. Oh, what fun! I shall never forget it! He was stuck up by your side, talking the most ridiculous stuff, I dare say, when I leaped down suddenly upon him from the branch above. I never did anything better in my life! Over he went like a dead thing. The old fellow was too much frightened, and too stiff in his joints, to catch hold of the boughs below, so down he tumbled to the ground. I declare I thought he was killed! But no, he only broke—ha! ha! ha! I am ready to die when I think of it—he only *broke his tail!* Ha! ha! he never could hold it up over his back afterwards, so there it was always dragging behind him, like a bundle of dead grass. What a ridiculous old fellow! After that tumble, he always went by the name Broketail, instead of Bigtail; and from that time you never could abide him, you know."

"Really, Mr. Brush," said his partner, "if you make such a fool of yourself, I wont speak another word to you all day. What has all this nonsense to do with the serious conversation you wished to have with me about the children?"

"Oh yes, it was about the children I wanted to talk to you," replied Brush, "and not about old Broken——. Well, well, I wont say anything more about him, then, so come and sit down quietly again, and I'll be very serious indeed! There! now we are all right once more. Well, my dear, now then about these children of ours. I believe you know what I am going to say—*we must part from them*, Mrs. Brush! It is high time for you and me to see about putting the nest in order for another family, and these three children of ours must go and see the world, and find companions for themselves, for the rest of their lives. I only hope that when the boys are seeking for companions they will not break their tails like old ——; I mean, I hope they will both meet with as good a partner as their mother has been to me."

The two old squirrels had a great deal more talk upon this subject, but as conversation about family affairs is often rather tiresome, I shall not repeat all they said about the matter. Though they both regretted parting from their children, they were convinced that a separation was necessary, and they agreed that the sooner it took place the better.

Perhaps you may think they were rather unamiable and hard-hearted, in treating their children in this manner; but you must remember that, though these were not yet a year old, they were very nearly, if not quite, as large as their parents, and were well able to take care of themselves.

When the young squirrels were informed of this determination, they were very sorry at first; but the thoughts of being their own masters, and of having comfortable nests of their own, reconciled them to the separation. I never heard what good advice their parents gave them at parting, but I have not the least doubt that Brush cautioned them to beware of the sad fate of old Broketail.

So the three children, leaving their native tree, set off by themselves into the wide world, and I have nothing more to tell you about *them*. We must see what Brush and his companion did during the rest of the summer, what adventures they met with, and what new acquaintances they found among the various animals that lived in the neighbourhood of their beautiful oak-tree.

Here I must give you a short description of the place where this tree grew, and where it had flourished for five or six hundred years at least.

It was in a small, but very beautiful valley, through which ran a brook of the clearest water imaginable. This little stream came down from the hills, and ran through the upper part of the valley, in a very furious manner, as if it were in a hurry to be gone, that it might join the dark deep river, and reach the wide ocean at last. But just at the spot

where our oak raised its head very far above all the trees around it, the impatient stream gradually changed its manner of proceeding, and began to run more slowly, as if desirous of remaining a little longer in such a delightful spot. So, after quietly winding backwards and forwards for some time, it spread itself out at last into the form of a most beautiful little pond, through which the current was so slow that it was hardly perceptible.

The gentleman to whom this valley, and the country around it, belonged, had spent many hundreds of pounds, and had employed the most skilful people he could find, in making his gardens and pleasure-grounds as gay and beautiful as possible. And yet, if you had walked all over his property, you would have said that no part of it was half so lovely as this little retired valley, where the art of man had never done anything to add to its exceeding beauty. The gardener's spade and pruning-knife had never been used here. Everything you saw was fresh and unaltered from the hand of God himself.

I think the most beautiful part was the pond, and the open space just around it; for here the finest wild-flowers grew in abundance, and the noble oak-tree was so near, that, when the winds of autumn came down the valley, the trout, that delighted to swim in those pure waters, were sometimes startled by a shower of acorns, falling down from the outermost branches, and making a terrible splash over their heads.

I have not time to describe more than a very few of the plants which were to be found in the pond and on its banks. There was the water-lily, with its large green leaves laying flat upon the water, and its splendid white flowers, just raising their heads above the surface; the flowering-rush, which bears a bunch of beautiful pink blossoms on a high tapering stem; and the buckbean, which, though at a distance it does not look so grand as the other two, has such an exquisitely beautiful fringe on its pinky-white flowers, that the most skilful painter has never yet been able to produce even a tolerable imitation of it.

Many other lovely plants there were growing round the pond, and in other parts of this delightful little valley: plants which exceeded in beauty many of those we cultivate with so much care in our gardens and hot-houses. But when I began this little history I meant to write about "Squirrels and other Animals," and not to give a description of plants. We must therefore return to our friends in the oak-tree.

2 The genus *myoxus*, to which the dormouse belongs, appears to be intermediate between the genera *sciurus* and *mus*, in each of which this animal has been placed by different naturalists.

CHAPTER III.

After the departure of their children the squirrels felt, as you may suppose, rather dull and lonely at first, but they very wisely made use of a remedy for low spirits, which I would strongly recommend to you, whenever you find yourself melancholy or uncomfortable in your mind from any cause. And particularly when you are so, *without* any apparent cause; for we sometimes see people very dismal and melancholy, when they have every good thing they can wish, and *ought* to be cheerful and happy. This wonderful and never failing remedy for low spirits is *employment*! Try it, my dear melancholy young reader, and whether you have a good reason for your sadness or not, you will at least have met with something worth remembering in this history.

Our squirrels, then, instead of sitting moping side by side on a bough, and grumbling out to each other, "What miserable creatures we are!" instead of thus giving way to their melancholy thoughts, they immediately began to make use of the *remedy* I have mentioned. The first thing they did was carefully to examine the nest, to see what repairs it stood in need of. It would at any rate require a fresh lining of moss and leaves; so all the old bedding, which I must confess was rather dusty and untidy, was taken off, and kicked out of the hole, together with a quantity of nut-shells and other rubbish, which had been collecting there for some months. When this work was finished, it was found that the under part, or groundwork of the nest, which consisted of small twigs and fibres curiously interlaced, was very rotten, and required to be almost entirely renewed. So there was plenty of work to do, and very diligently the squirrels laboured to complete it. Not that they worked like slaves, from morning till night. Oh no! they allowed themselves abundance of time for feasting and fun, for they were such merry, light-hearted creatures, that they could not live without a good game of play now and then. They even mixed play with their work; for when they had to go to a little distance for some particularly fine soft moss, or other materials for nest-building, they were sure to have a race, to try which of them could reach the place first. So the days passed by right merrily.

"It is very odd," said Brush, one evening, just before he rolled himself up for the night in the warm *blanket* I have before mentioned; "It is very odd that we should have lived almost all our lives so near that family of water-rats, in the bank of the pond, and have

known so little about them. I always thought them a savage, bloodthirsty, set of fellows, and that they would make no scruple of killing fish, or young birds, or mice, or any other small animal that they could master. But what do you think Gotobed told me just now, as I came up the tree? Why, he says, that it is all a mistake, and that he is certain that these water-rats are a very decent, quiet sort of people, feeding on vegetables, like ourselves. He says, that as he was creeping about just now among the grass, close to the edge of the pond, but a long way from the water-rats' holes, which are all on the opposite side, he suddenly found himself quite close to one of these creatures, who was perched up on a flat stone, and busily gnawing the root of some plant. Our poor little cousin, you know, has not much presence of mind, so in his fright, and terrible hurry to escape from the monster, he slipped off the bank, and rolled into the water. The splash he made frightened the rat, who plumped into the water too, and so there they were both swimming close together. Gotobed expected to be eaten up in a minute, but the rat only said to him, 'Ha! ha! little fellow, is it only you? Not much used to swimming I see! But come down some fine evening, and I'll teach you. The water is too cold just now for such as you.'

"Gotobed was too much frightened to say a word, so he scrambled up the bank, and ran home to his nest as fast as possible. Poor little thing! he looked so miserable, with his beautiful fur dripping wet, and sticking close to his body."

"What a ridiculous story," said Mrs. Brush, who could hardly keep herself awake till it was finished; "Why I have heard Gotobed say, that his mother used to tell a story about a relation of hers, who lived a good way off, who was killed and eaten up in a moment, by one of these very water-rats. I have even heard it said, that the males will often kill and eat the young ones, if their mothers are not careful to hide them. Depend upon it, they are a horrid set, and I often wish they did not live quite so near us."

"Well," said Brush, gaping, "I'll try to find out something more about them to-morrow; but I declare I can't keep awake any longer just now."

So the next afternoon, our squirrel, who had some courage, and a great deal of curiosity, determined, if possible, to learn something about the character of these water-rats, one of whom, by a kind word spoken to little Gotobed, had so altered his opinion of their disposition and manner of living.

Brush chose the afternoon for his visit, because he had observed that these animals came out of their holes more at that time than in the middle of the day. But our inquisitive friend did not allow his curiosity to lead him into any danger, in this inquiry into the proceedings of his neighbours. He therefore crept through the high grass to the other side of the pond, and very quietly climbed up into a low willow-tree, overhanging the bank, in which the water-rats had made their habitations. Here, concealed among the leaves, he had a full view of all that passed below.

Close to the steep bank, in which these animals had bored many round holes, was a small flat space of fine pebbles and sand, sloping down into the water on one side, and on the other, bordered by a thick bed of the sweet-smelling water-mint, with here and there a stem of the plant called horsetail, towering up like a gigantic palm-tree in the midst of a forest. On this pleasant little pebbly beach, Brush perceived several water-rats, both old and young; and some very grave looking faces were peeping out of their holes in the bank, watching the proceedings of their companions below.

One of those on the beach had his attention entirely engaged by the root of some plant, which he was nibbling; another was busily cleaning his fur with his fore-paws; and two very young ones were paddling about in the shallow water, into which their mother, as Brush supposed, had taken them, for the first time in their lives, to give them a lesson in swimming. Sometimes one of the grave looking gentlemen in the bank, either for amusement, or in search of food, would leap, or rather *tumble*, from the mouth of his hole, into the water, and dive at once to the bottom, with the greatest ease imaginable; but he could not remain under much more than a minute at a time, for want of breath. When he came up again to the surface, Brush was exceedingly surprised to see that, instead of appearing wet and miserable, like poor little Gotobed after his ducking, his hair was as dry as if he had never been into the water at all.

"How delightful it must be to dive and swim about like that!" said the squirrel to himself, and he could hardly help jumping in to try his skill, forgetting that he was not formed for moving through the water, but for running and leaping about among the branches of trees. I wonder how he would have managed his bushy tail in swimming, and how funny it would have looked with the long hair all wet and sticking together! Perhaps he thought of this himself. At any rate, he did not jump into the water just then, but remained looking down from his hiding-place in the willow-tree, very much pleased with what he had hitherto seen of these clever divers and swimmers.

"Well," said he to himself, "they don't eat their own young ones, that is clear enough; but how they might treat any other small animal that came in their way I cannot possibly tell. And yet the great old rat that frightened poor Gotobed so terribly, behaved very well, I am sure; but then perhaps he was not hungry just then, and only asked him to come again and be taught to swim that he might make a meal of him another time. So I won't have anything to say to them just yet. Perhaps if I wait here a little longer, I may see something that will decide the matter."

And the matter *was* decided, sooner than Brush expected. At a little distance from the water-rats' station, he now perceived a most singular looking animal, which was quite a stranger to him, though he had a pretty large acquaintance among his neighbours. It was about the size of a common mouse, but of a deep velvety black above, and white underneath, and its nose was very long and pointed, like the snout of a pig. His eyes were very small indeed, and looked like little black beads deeply set in his head.

This curious, but beautiful little animal behaved exactly like a person who knows that he has a great deal of work to get through in a very short time. I mean, that he was very diligent and active, and seemed determined not to lose a moment by stopping to rest himself, or to consider what he should do next. He appeared to be an excellent swimmer and diver, thrusting his long nose under the leaves at the bottom of the water, in search of insects I suppose, and when he came to the surface again, his fur was quite dry, like that of the water-rats. So when he dived, this water-repelling property in his fur made him appear of a beautiful silvery white colour, from the number of small air bubbles he carried down with him. He was never still for a moment, either diving to the bottom, or swimming, with a very quick wriggling motion on the surface, and every now and then he would come to the shore, from which he seldom ventured very far.

"A very queer little fellow indeed, upon my word!" said Brush, "I wonder who he is. I cannot help liking him though, for he seems so clever and industrious. Oh dear me! how I wish I could dive in that beautiful clear water! But I declare he is coming nearer and nearer every minute to that old rat, who is so busy gnawing his root. Now, when the little one passes him, we shall see what will happen. I am sure the old rat must be terribly hungry, or he would not gnaw that disagreeable looking root so eagerly, and if he does not pounce upon the little black fellow, and tear him to pieces, I shall be very much astonished indeed."

The squirrel was not long kept in suspense, for just as he had finished talking the matter over to himself, the little velvet-coated swimmer, intent upon his own important business, came paddling along very near the shore, and at last landed quite close to the spot where the rat was still engaged with his root. But when he perceived the visitor, he immediately left off eating, and slowly turned his head towards him!



THE WATER-RAT AND WATER-SHREWMOUSE.

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"Horrible! he'll have him now! 'Tis all over with him," said Brush, quite trembling with eagerness to see the end of the affair. "'Tis all over with the little black fellow, and these rats are rascals after all!"

But he was very much mistaken, for the only animal that lost its life upon the occasion, was a small insect, which the bead-like eyes of little velvet-coat had perceived crawling upon a stone, near the water's edge, and in his eagerness to secure this valuable prize, I suppose he did not observe that such a large fierce-looking creature was close by, or perhaps he had found from experience that there was nothing to fear from him. However, the little fellow boldly seized his prey, and darted off with it into the water, while the quiet old gentleman went on munching his root again.

Now when Brush witnessed this peaceable meeting of the two animals, proving that water-rats were not the cruel, savage tempered creatures, they are generally supposed to be, he was so delighted, that he quite forgot that he had intended to have been a concealed spectator of their proceedings. So he called out as loud as he could,—

"Capital, I declare! 'Tis all a lie from beginning to end. Little Gotobed was right after all. They *are* a very decent, quiet set, as he said."

But this expression of his sentiments quite interrupted the peaceable employments of the company below, for the loud strange voice nearly over their heads frightened them so, that they all either dived under water, or retreated into their holes. However, the squirrel had now satisfied his curiosity, and as he was rather frightened himself at the disturbance he had made, he hastily leaped down from his hiding-place, and scampered home to his nest. As for little velvet-coat, I never heard what became of him, but no doubt he found a place to hide himself in. But I believe I have never told you who he was. He was a *water-shrewmouse*,³ and very much like the common shrewmouse that we often find lying dead in lanes and pathways. But he was larger than the common shrewmouse, and altogether a much handsomer animal.

³ Though this beautiful and interesting little animal, the water-shrewmouse, was for a long time almost unnoticed by the naturalists of this country, it cannot be considered as a rare species. Bell, in his History of British Quadrupeds, informs us, that it is not uncommon in many parts of England, and he says, that its black velvet-like fur and long snout have sometimes given rise to an opinion, that it is a small species of mole, to which animal its structure and habits indicate a near affinity.

CHAPTER IV.

When Brush gave an account of all that he had seen to his partner, who was of a much more cautious disposition than himself, he was rather vexed that she still seemed not quite convinced that these water-rats were such peaceable, good-tempered animals as he believed them to be. It was very tiresome, to be sure, but she *would* keep on relating

all the foolish old tales she had ever heard about their killing other animals, and even their own children. We all know how disagreeable it is when we have been taking a great deal of trouble to persuade other people to think like ourselves on any subject, to find at last, after half-an-hour's talking, that they are just as much attached to their own opinions as ever. Now our squirrel was really a very good-tempered fellow in general, but I must confess that he was rather cross on this occasion; and though he did not say much about it, he showed that he was "a little out of sorts," as people say, by curling himself up for the night fully half an hour before his usual time of going to sleep.

But the next morning he awoke in a very good-humoured mood indeed, and worked hard all day with his companion, to complete the nest. He seemed to have forgotten the subject of their dispute, till towards evening, when, as he was sitting alone on a branch of the oak, on the side nearest the pond, a *bat* suddenly fluttered by, skimming with zigzag flight over the still water.

"There goes old Leatherwing, I declare!" exclaimed Brush: "the very person I was wishing to see! I'll call out to him to stop the next time he passes, and ask him to set me right about those water-rats. He is a very learned old fellow, and I believe knows something about every animal in the woods. To be sure, old Leatherwing is often rather tiresome and prosy, and he *will* talk a great deal about his own affairs; but then he is a very clever old gentleman for all that, and has seen a great deal of the world."

For some time Leatherwing continued flying backwards and forwards, over the upper end of the pond, and seemed determined not to approach the oak-tree. The truth is, that his game, which consisted of gnats and other small insects, was abundant just at that spot, and a very hearty supper he made that evening. I suppose he found the legs and wings of these insects rather dry food, for sometimes, as he skimmed over the water, he would dip in like a swallow, and drink a few drops as he passed, in order to wash them down.

While he is eating his supper, I intend to give you a short, and I hope not a very uninteresting description of his curious wings. As for his habits and manner of passing his time, I dare say that he will take care to say something upon that subject himself, when he gets into conversation with Brush, who has just informed us that "old Leatherwing *will* talk a great deal about his own affairs."

Almost every person, whether living in the town or country, must often have observed the bat flitting about trees and houses in a calm summer evening, but many have never taken the trouble to examine him more closely, or have not had an opportunity of doing so. To form a proper idea of the structure of the bat's wings you must understand, that his fore-legs, or his *arms*, as I will call them, are almost as long as his body, and that all the four fingers of his hands are *quite as long as his arms*. Between these immensely long and slender fingers, is stretched, (like the silk on the framework of an umbrella,) a

very thin elastic skin, or membrane, 4 which is continued from the tips of the little fingers to the ankles of the hind-legs, and then very nearly to the end of the tail, which is almost as long as his body. So that the animal, when spread out in the flying position, is entirely surrounded with the membrane, except at the head and neck. The toes of the hind-foot, and the thumb of the hand, are not attached to the skin, and are not longer than those of other animals. These are furnished with sharp and hooked claws, so that the bat can cling very firmly to walls and perpendicular rocks.

It has been said, that the bat is nothing more than a *mouse with wings*. Nonsense! except in its size, it has no more resemblance to the *mouse*, than it has to the *lion*; and those who think that the two animals are at all alike can never have examined them attentively. However, in some parts of the country the bat is still called by its old English name, "*the flittermouse*," that is, the mouse that *flitters*, or *flutters* about.

When Leatherwing had caught most of the insects at the upper end of the pond, he thought he would try what success he could meet with lower down; and then he came so near the oak-tree that Brush managed to make him hear at last. So the bat, who happened to be in rather a talkative mood, left off insect-hunting for the present, for the sake of enjoying a little gossip with his old acquaintance. He settled on a branch close by, but instead of sitting down like other animals, the queer little creature chose to hang himself up by his hind-claws, with his head downwards, and his wings closely folded round him. In this strange, and, as most people would think, extremely uncomfortable position, old Leatherwing began the following conversation:—

LEATHERWING.

Well, Master Brush, what do you want with me now? Just made such a glorious supper! Do you know, I fancy that the insects about this pond of yours are fatter and better tasted than any others, and that's the reason I come so far after them. For 'tis a good way off, you know, to the old church-tower where I live. Well, but as I was saying, what do you want with me this evening?

BRUSH.

Why, I want to ask you a question, for to tell you the truth, yesterday evening Mrs. B. and I had a little——

LEATHERWING.

What! a little addition to your family? you don't say so! Well, I thought it was almost time, for we are nearly in the middle of summer. Now do you know Mrs. Leatherwing was confined several days ago, and that's the reason she is not with me this evening. I left her flying up and down a shady lane nearer home, carrying her baby about with her, as she always does, you know, till it grows pretty strong. She had only one this time.

And so Mrs. Brush is confined, is she? Well, I congratulate you. How many has she got? Five or six, I'll be bound!

BRUSH.

She hasn't got any at all yet, Mr. Leatherwing, though what may happen in the course of a few days I cannot possibly tell. But I want to ask you a question about something that has puzzled us very much lately.

LEATHERWING.

To be sure, I dare say I shall be able to answer it; for though I say it myself, I *am* able to give you an answer to almost any question. For you see, friend Brush, I have lived all my life in towns and villages, and so I have heard and seen a good deal of what passes in the world. Then I am not like you sleepy animals, who hardly ever wake up more than once or twice during the whole winter. To be sure, I take a little nap myself, of about a couple of months, in the very coldest weather, when there are no insects stirring. We bats, you know, can't eat nuts, and such sort of trash; and so when there is no wholesome food to be met with, we are obliged to sleep a little, just to pass away the time. Now, if I could contrive to keep a winter stock of *gnats*, as easily as you can of *nuts*, I declare I would not sleep much more in winter than in summer. For I don't mind a little frost, not I! only in cold weather, instead of flying about in the evening, as I do at this time of the year, I choose the sunshine in the middle of the day, because then I have the best chance of meeting with some game. And yet ignorant people say that I cannot bear the light of the sun! I can tell you, that I picked up a pretty good meal of insects one bright day last winter, when the ground was frozen hard, and I heard some of the stupid boys in our village call out, as I passed them, 'Why! there's a bat! Throw thy cap at him, Jem! What business has *he* got to be flying about now, I wonder?' And then another said, 'Throw at him! Well done! Once get him down on the ground, and he can neither run nor fly. These fellows can't raise themselves off the ground, dost know!'

"Great fools! I might easily have shown them that I can both run very well on the ground, and fly up from it when I choose; but I did *not* choose to try it just then. But let me see, what were we talking about? You were going to ask me a question, I think."

As Brush had now an opportunity of speaking at last, he related to Leatherwing all the tales he had heard about the evil doings of the water-rats, and also what he had himself observed of their habits. Then he asked the bat for his opinion upon this puzzling question, and the old fellow gave it as follows:—

LEATHERWING.

The longer I live in the world, my good friend Brush, and the more I see of the world, the more I am astonished at the stupidity and amazing ignorance of the people I meet

with! To be sure, everybody has not had such good opportunities as myself of obtaining information, or has not made such good use of them. But let that pass. Now for these water-rats. In the first place, then, they *are* a very quiet, inoffensive people, and would no more think of killing a mouse, or a young bird, or any other small animal, than you would. The only mischief they ever do is by boring their holes through the embankments of canals and ponds, and in this manner the meadows have sometimes been flooded. In the second place, all the other wicked deeds that they have been accused of should be laid to the charge of the *common brown rat*, a ferocious, savage-tempered creature, which often lives in the banks of ditches, and is then supposed by silly people to be the same animal as the water-rat.

BRUSH.

Capital! so I was right after all about the character of these good-tempered neighbours of ours. Ho, ho! Mrs. Brush, I shall have something to tell you presently! Then it must have been one of these common brown rascal that killed little Gotobed's relation.

LEATHERWING.

To be sure it was, for as I tell you, they are fierce, savage creatures, and are so voracious that they will eat anything. They destroy young birds and other animals; and if no other food could be found, I dare say they would be wicked and unnatural enough to make a meal of their own young ones. And yet, let me tell you, they are very clever, sensible creatures, if they would but make a better use of their abilities. The worst of it all is that they are *foreigners*, and have no business in this country at all, though from what part of the world they came I cannot tell you. ⁵ And if I cannot answer this question, you may be sure, friend Brush, that there are not many people living who can. However, here the rascals are; and what do you think they have been endeavouring to do ever since they came? Why, they have been trying to destroy all the rats that had possession of the country before their arrival; and as these old English black rats, as they are called from their colour, are smaller and weaker than themselves, I dare say that they will at last succeed in their wicked designs. So as this vile foreign brown rat is fond of living in the banks of ditches and of ponds, near mills and stables, he is often thought to be the same as the quiet respectable water-rat. For, as I say, the stupidity and ignorance of people is really amazing! Why, the two animals are no more alike than you and I are, I was going to say; certainly not nearly so much alike, except in size, as yourself and the little Gotobeds down below, there. No! these water friends of yours should never acknowledge the common rat as a cousin; but they are not very distantly related to a much more noble animal—to the *beaver*, ⁶ friend Brush, though perhaps you have never heard of such a creature.

Well, well, we must not expect too much from people who have never had an opportunity of learning. I could tell you a good deal about this relation of the water-rat,

this clever fellow called the beaver, and about the famous wooden houses he makes of the trunks and branches of trees. But I declare I must fly home, and see how Mrs. Leatherwing is getting on. Oh! stop a minute, though; I forgot one thing. Perhaps *you* don't believe that I can run on a level surface, or raise myself from it, as you may never have seen me do it. Look here, then!

So saying, the funny little creature made what he called a *run*, along the large branch upon which Brush was seated, and at the end of this *run* of two or three feet in length, he gave a sort of a little spring into the air, and instantly spreading his beautiful wings, he sailed away from the tree, saying, "Good bye, Brush! what d'ye think of that, eh?"

But the squirrel did not return the farewell, for when he saw the very ridiculous manner in which his friend shuffled along, while he performed the feat which he called *running*, he was seized with such a fit of laughter that he could make no reply, and he was even obliged to hold fast, lest he should fall off the branch. When he had recovered from his merriment, he began to talk to himself, in an unusually grave and moralizing strain.

"Well, Mr. Leatherwing," said he, "you are an odd fellow, a very odd little fellow indeed! But I have learned something from you this evening, besides the information you gave me about those rats. I have learned that every animal has a different part to perform in the world, and that we all should be content with our situations, and not attempt to do things for which we were never intended. Now I suppose nobody will deny that I can run and leap famously, so that I am quite at home among the boughs of this beautiful oak; but I cannot fly at all, and I believe I should be a very poor swimmer. Then there is my neighbour, the water-rat, who can both dive and swim like a fish, but he can no more fly than myself, and I am sure he cannot leap half so well. As for old Leatherwing, the *air* is for him, and most delightful it must be to fly and sail about as he does. But then he must be content with *flying only*, for I think he would be much worse off in the water than I should, and when he attempts to run or to leap—Ha! ha! what fun! I must go and tell Mrs. Brush all about that."

⁴ The membrane of the bat's wing appears to possess a most exquisite and inconceivable sensibility. Cruel experiments have proved that this animal, when deprived of the senses of seeing, hearing, and smelling, will still fly about a room, without ever coming into contact with the walls, or with threads stretched across in all directions. Cuvier supposes, that "the propinquity of solid bodies is perceived by the manner in which the air re-acts upon the

surface of the wings." This astonishing faculty, which almost indicates the possession of a sixth sense unknown to us, is no doubt of great use to the bat, as it enables him to pursue his rapid zigzag flight in the dark, without fear of striking against the boughs of trees, or other obstacles.

The animal introduced in the tale is the common bat, *Vespertilio pipistrellus* of modern naturalists. It is now ascertained that no less than seventeen species of this singular family are natives of this country. Some of them are very much larger than the common bat, measuring fifteen inches in the extent of their wings.

5 The common brown rat, which has now been an inhabitant of this island for about one hundred years, is often improperly called the "Norway rat," as if it came originally from that country; whereas, it was quite unknown there when it first received that name. Pennant believes that it was brought over in merchant-vessels from the East Indies.

It is even supposed, that the old English black rat, as it is called, is not originally a native of this island, as no mention is made of it in any author earlier than the middle of the sixteenth century.

6 The characters of the teeth, the form of the body, and the habits of the water-rat, fully justify its removal from the genus *mus*, to which the common rat belongs, and indicate a pretty close affinity to the beaver. Linnæus himself appears struck with this, for though in his *Systema Naturæ* he has placed the water-rat in the genus *mus*, in a subsequent work he has removed it to that of *castor*.

CHAPTER V.

The important event upon which Leatherwing had been in such haste to congratulate his friend, really took place in two days after the conversation just related. In other words, the joys and cares of our squirrels were increased by the presence of four young ones, as fine healthy little creatures as their hearts could desire. And I am sure that more

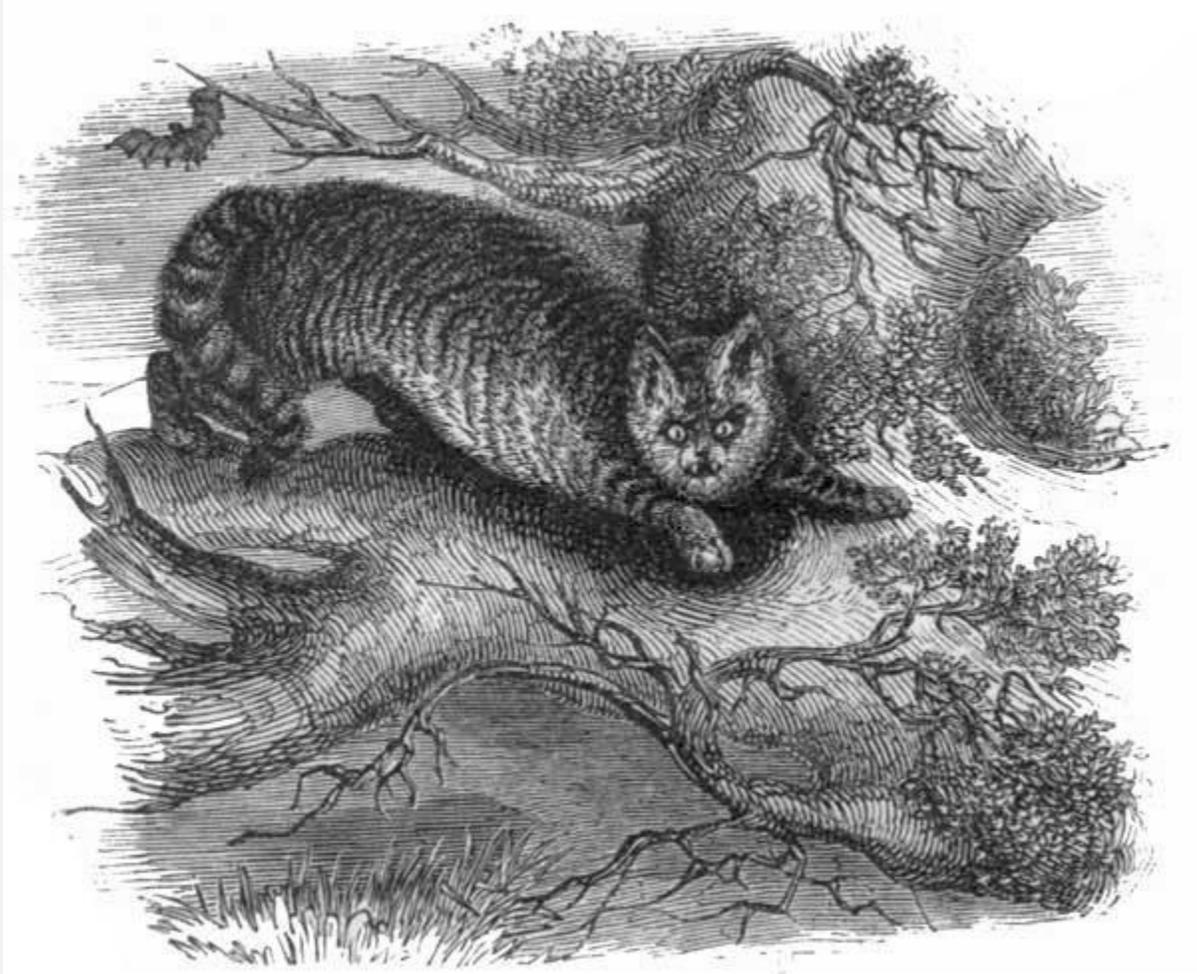
attentive and affectionate parents than Brush and his companion could not be found, even among the human race. For many days they made a point of never leaving the nest at the same time, for fear their tender family should suffer for want of their parents' warmth and protection. And though Brush was naturally such a playful rattling fellow, you might have observed some difference in his behaviour, since he became the father of four helpless children. I mean, that he spent less time in play, and seldom rambled to any great distance from the oak-tree. So for a week or two our squirrels passed their time very sedately and quietly, taking care of their children, and watching with great delight their rapid growth from day to day.

One evening, just before bed-time, Brush was peering out at the entrance of his hole, as he often did before he curled himself up for the night, perhaps that he might see what sort of weather it was likely to be the next day. Whatever his object might have been, he certainly *was* looking out of his hole on this particular evening; when, casting his eyes down the valley, he perceived a small dark speck dancing about in the air, and as it drew nearer, and became more distinct, he saw that it was his friend Leatherwing, coming to enjoy his favourite sport of gnat-catching, over the surface of the pond.

"I feel rather sleepy," said Brush, "but I have not seen the old fellow for some time, and I *must* tell him what has happened since he was here last."

So he ran out to the end of a branch, and when the bat came within hail he begged him to stop for a few minutes' chat.

Now, though Leatherwing was very hungry, and his game was abundant, yet his love of a little gossip was so great, that it overcame his dislike to the feeling of an empty stomach, and he was just going to alight on the branch, by the side of his friend, when he suddenly called out in a voice of extreme terror, "Back, friend Brush! Run back to your hole directly! Back, you foolish fellow, or the cruel wild-cat will have you!"



THE WILD-CAT.

Page 99.

Horrible! the monstrous wild-cat, the British tigress as she has been called, was in the tree indeed! She was crouching down on a neighbouring branch, between the squirrel and the nest, preparing herself for the fearful spring, by that peculiar wriggling motion of the hinder part of the body which you may often have observed in your favourite kitten, when she is just going to dart at the plaything you have kindly made for her amusement.

At first sight of the monster, the poor little squirrel was so terrified that he had no power to move, for her great savage eyes were fixed upon him, and sent forth a horrible greenish coloured light, which seemed to have the effect of preventing any attempt at escape. But he recovered himself at last, and it was well for him that he did so; for hardly, by means of a tremendous spring, had he reached a distant bough, when his

fierce pursuer, who must have leaped at the same instant, alighted on the very spot he had just quitted. And now between these two animals, so unequally matched in strength and size, you might have seen a most exciting and hardly contested race; the squirrel doing his utmost to secure his safety, by reaching his hole, and the wild-cat following with terrible eagerness, in hopes of obtaining a most delicate and favourite morsel for her supper. Had they both started fairly, I think that the fierce beast would have had no chance of overtaking her prey; but, as I have mentioned, she was between the squirrel and his fortress when the chase began, so that he could not run at once to his only place of refuge.

Poor Brush! he was hardly pressed indeed, and several times, when he found his retreat to his hole cut off, he gave himself up for lost. He owed his safety at last, not to his wonderful agility alone, but also to his *lightness*, which enabled him to pass over the smaller branches that would have bent or broken with the weight of his enemy. To keep you no longer in suspense, you must know, then, that the poor breathless terrified squirrel reached his hole at last, and no sooner was he safe within it, than an immense paw, furnished with terribly sharp, hooked claws, was thrust in as far as it could reach, and Brush could see the light of those horrid, yellow-green eyes, gleaming in upon him through the narrow opening. He even fancied he could smell her hot tainted breath, as she growled with rage and disappointment.

"Baulked, Mrs. Wild-cat! Exactly three seconds too late, Mrs. Tabby! Yes, Madam, if you had reached the hole only three seconds earlier, you would have made a very nice supper of poor Brush, and his nest would that night have contained a sorrowful widow and four fatherless children. A little too late, I am happy to say, Mrs. Tabby! Only a very little too late, but 'a miss is as good as a mile,' as people say. What! you are in a terrible rage now, are you? And you will growl, and spit, and try to thrust your great ugly head into a hole only just large enough for the slender body of Brush to pass easily through it. There! you may do your worst, and when you have tired yourself, you may go and look for a supper elsewhere, only I cannot possibly wish that good luck may attend upon your hunting. One thing I *do* wish though, that Harvey was under the tree just now with his gun. Well, never mind! Your time will come, I dare say."

Yes, the squirrel had escaped from his terrible enemy for that time. He and his family were safe as long as they remained in their castle, and they had still sufficient food in their hoard to stand a pretty long siege, though I cannot tell what they would have done for want of water. But then how miserable it would be, to be kept close prisoners for days, or even weeks; for how could they ever be certain that their enemy was not still in the neighbourhood, or perhaps lying in wait for them behind some branch of their own oak-tree? Truly a very pitiable situation indeed!

It is wonderful how we become accustomed to dangers of all kinds, and yet those who have often risked their lives in battle will tell you, that this is really the case. In his first

trial the young soldier will perhaps be so terribly frightened that nothing but the certainty of being disgraced prevents his running away. But after some years spent amid dangers, the coward becomes by degrees a bold fellow, who can hear bullets whistle around him, and see bright steel flash before his eyes, if not with indifference, at least, with perfect coolness and steadiness.

But what has all this about soldiers to do with the poor prisoners in the oak tree? There does not appear to be much connexion between the two subjects, certainly; but I was going to say that our *squirrels* resembled *soldiers* in one respect. I mean, that *they* became rather more courageous by being accustomed to live in continual danger. For the first day or two after the chase, they were afraid to venture more than a few yards from the nest; but they rambled further by degrees, though, whenever they returned to the oak, they took care to stop in a tree at a little distance, that they might see if the enemy was not lying in ambush for them near the hole. In this manner many days passed, and they were beginning to hope that the wild-cat had quite left the neighbourhood, when they had a conversation with Leatherwing about this dreadful animal.

It was really surprising what a vast deal of information this funny little fellow had picked up; but, perhaps, as he said himself, his having lived so much in towns and villages, where he could overhear the conversation of Man, might partly account for his cleverness.

From him the squirrels learned that these terrible wild-cats were formerly very common in the neighbouring forests, ⁷ but that for many years they had been gradually diminishing in numbers, and it was now almost certain that the fierce beast which had caused them so much alarm, was the last of her race in that part of the country. Wild-cats are always much larger than the tame animals, but this creature was one of the largest that had ever been seen or heard of. She was really a formidable beast, and since she had taken up her abode in the neighbourhood, she had done a great deal of mischief to the farmers by killing their poultry, and even their young lambs. She had often been chased by the gamekeepers and others, but long experience had made her so watchful and cunning, that she had always escaped with her life, though she had sometimes smarted a little from a few shot penetrating her skin. But her fur was so thick and close that small shot could not injure her much, unless fired from a very short distance, and she took care that her enemies should not approach too near.

Such dreadful tales did Leatherwing relate of the extraordinary cunning and fierceness of this hideous animal! When he had finished, the squirrels became so terrified that they ran and hid themselves in their snug retreat, declaring to each other that they never should be happy till they were sure that the monster had been killed. They were particularly uneasy too about their young ones, who were now grown so strong that they

were able to leave the nest; but their parents never allowed them to go out of their sight, or to ramble beyond the branches of the oak.

One day Brush said to his partner, "Well, this is miserable work! I declare I have no peace night or day, but am always thinking or dreaming about this horrid wild-cat; I almost wish I had never been born, or at least, that I had been a water-rat, or, better still, that curious fellow called a mole, that Leatherwing talked to me about once."

"And where does this mole live?" said Mrs. Brush.

"Why, he spends almost all his life under the ground, and though it must be very dark and damp there, he is at least safe from being eaten up by wild beasts. He makes famous long caverns, branching out from each other and in one place he has a very comfortable nest, lined with dry grass and leaves, and among the roots of some tree he makes what Leatherwing called his fortress, because he always goes there when he is frightened. And all these nice places are safe under the ground. Oh! I really wish I was a mole! The wild-cat might come as soon as she pleased, then."

"I think she would scratch the earth up with her great claws, and pull you out of your fortress, as you call it."

"How could she? Why there are I don't know how many caverns, all leading from the fortress, and I could easily escape by one or other of them. Then I could dig through the earth a great deal faster than she could, if I were a mole; for Leatherwing says, that his fore-feet are amazingly large and strong. Oh! ten times stronger than mine! Then he never goes to sleep much more in the winter than in the summer, for when the ground is frozen hard, all he has to do is to dig down a little deeper, till he finds the earth soft; so he never cares what sort of weather it is, and he has no need to trouble himself about laying up a store of provisions for the winter. Oh! it must be very nice to be a mole!"

"I should be afraid that my eyes would be filled with dust and dirt, when I was digging under the ground."

"*Your* great staring eyes would, I dare say, but the mole's are very different. They are so small, and covered over with fur, that he is sometimes thought to be quite blind. ⁸ For, as Leatherwing says, people *are* so stupid and ignorant! But I believe the mole's little eyes are not often of much use to him, for he seldom comes out of his caverns, and when he does it is at night. I think he would be much wiser to keep *always* under ground, and then he would be quite safe. I asked old Leatherwing how the mole could find out his food, as he always lives in the dark, and he said that his nose is more useful to him than his eyes, for he can smell anything at a great distance."

"And what can he find to eat under ground, I should like to know?"

"Horrible! I forgot all about that when I wished to be a mole. His food, I can hardly bear even to talk about it! He lives almost entirely on *worms*! Horrid, long, twining worms! Oh! I had rather be hunted by the wild-cat every day, than eat such disgusting food as that. No, no, I don't wish to change places with the mole now, I am sure."

So as Brush had neither the inclination nor the power to be transformed into a worm-devourer, he was obliged to be content with his situation as a *nut-cracker*.

⁷ The wild-cat is now almost, if not quite extinct in England, except in the northern parts. It is still, however, to be met with in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. But the numbers of these animals that have been killed in different parts of the country have no doubt been much over-rated, as it is well known that the domestic cat will sometimes stray into the woods, bringing forth its young there, living on birds and small quadrupeds, and becoming a terrible destroyer of game. When, therefore, one of these half-wild cats happens to resemble the true wild-cat in colour, (which is an indistinct tabby,) it is at once pronounced to be a specimen of that animal. But Mr. Bell, (who, however, differs from almost all other naturalists on this point,) considers that the native wild-cat of Britain is quite a distinct species from the domestic cat, and that the latter does not owe its origin to the wild animal at all, though from what country the breed has been derived he is at a loss to determine.

⁸ That acute observer, Aristotle, has been accused of inaccuracy, in saying, that the mole is absolutely blind. It has, however, been ascertained that in the South of Europe there exists another species of mole, the eyelids of which are *totally closed*, and it was probably this animal that fell under the observation of Aristotle. The mole has never been found in any part of Ireland.

CHAPTER VI.

Time passed rapidly on, and the autumn drew near. The young squirrels were now become so strong and active, and so fond of scampering about, that their parents could hardly prevent them from rambling away by themselves much further than was safe for them. One morning Brush was almost certain that he had seen their terrible enemy in a distant tree, and as his children happened to be unusually frolicsome just then, and determined to have their own way, he thought he would try to keep them at home, by relating a little story which he had heard at different times, from Leatherwing.

The old fellow said, that, one evening, as he was flying about in a garden, he observed a very young lady sitting in a summer-house, holding in her hand the smallest mouse he had ever seen, fastened by a string and a leather collar round its neck. So, as the bat was of a very inquisitive, prying disposition, he hung himself up to the ceiling of the summer-house, determined to overhear the conversation that was going on below. It appeared that the mouse was relating his adventures to his mistress. Now to tell you the truth, this little history has no connexion with the other parts of my tale; so if you are in a very great hurry to get to the end of the book, you can skip it altogether, but I hope you will not behave so rudely to a poor author, who has really done his best to entertain his readers.

Leatherwing's tale was called—

SOME PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF THE SMALLEST QUADRUPED IN THE
WORLD. 9

"Don't push and squeeze so Tiney! you take up more room than three or four of us."

"What a story! It is you Softsides, that want to have half the nest for yourself."

"Yes," squeaked sister Sleek, "and he has almost scratched my poor eye out,—the cross creature! only because I asked him to let me suck when he had had enough, and he knew how dreadfully thirsty I was."

"Be quiet children, will you?" said mamma; "and let me go to sleep. You forget what a terrible headache I have, and how tired I am with running away from that frightful weasel that chased me almost to death this morning. I should like to know what you would have done if he had caught me! Now mind! if I hear any more quarrelling, as surely as a grain of wheat has a husk, I will kick some of you out of the nest, and let the weasel or the owl make a meal of you."

This little specimen of a family quarrel, which took place when my brothers and sisters and myself were a few days old, and were not so large as hazel-nuts, is the earliest circumstance of my life of which I have any recollection. At this time we were eight in number, and though all of the same age, I was much the smallest and weakest of the brood, for which reason I suppose they called me "Mini-mus," or "the little mouse." My

brothers and sisters despised me so for my poor health, and were so cross and tyrannical, that I verily believe I should have perished in infancy if my mother had not taken pity on me, and allowed me to suck sometimes out of my turn. The truth is, I was rather a favourite with my dear mamma; why, I cannot imagine, for I was a miserable looking little object, and was often very cross and rude to her. But since I have seen more of the world, I find that mothers of your species, my dear mistress, often show the strongest attachment to those children who are the most worthless in mind and body, and the least deserving of their affection.

Well! thanks to my dear mother's care, I got through my infancy pretty well, though I am still much smaller than the rest of my family. But if you could have seen my poor brother Softsides! oh, he was a noble animal! Will you believe it? he was nearly twice my size, and such a runner and leaper! He made nothing of jumping up to our nest at one bound, without taking the trouble to climb up in the usual way. But I must leave Softsides for the present, and tell you what sort of a house our careful mother had provided for us.

It was built on the top of a thistle at a little distance from the ground, and was nicely sheltered from the wind and rain by a high close hedge. It was as round as a ball, and was made entirely of the blades of grass and small straws, carefully woven together like basket-work, while the inside was as smooth and warm as possible; for there was only one very small opening, and even that was closed at night, and in the daytime when the weather was cold. A most delightfully warm, snug house it was, I assure you; but as we increased in size, it became rather too small for us, and, as I have already mentioned, we sometimes squabbled a little for want of room. Indeed I once heard mamma saying to herself, when she thought we were all asleep, "Well, if I had known that I should have had such a large family I would have built a bigger house." Now you must know that she was only one year old herself, and we were her first brood of young ones. But though this was the first nest she had ever made, she had shown great judgment in choosing a situation, which was not, as is usually the case with our tribe, in a corn-field, where both the nests and the inhabitants are often destroyed by the reapers. Fearful of this dreadful disaster, our mother had built her nest on a grassy bank, in an unfrequented meadow, in which there was no public path, and where a few quiet sheep were our only companions. The field adjoining ours was a wheat-field, and so we had an abundant supply of food on the other side of the hedge.

For the first week or two we never left the nest; but mamma soon began to feed us with seeds, and when our teeth were too weak to nibble hard grains, she brought us the soft, unripe wheat, which was delicious juicy food for tender infants.

Never shall I forget the terrible fright I was in the first time I ventured to leave the nest, and clamber down the thistle-stalk to the ground! My brothers and sisters had been down the day before, and laughed at my timidity; and then they boasted that they had

scrambled up the bank, and looked through the hedge, into the wheat-field, where they had seen the reapers at work; and they told me that they had been terribly frightened by the barking of a large dog. But Softsides said that *he* was not frightened a bit, and that he only came back to the nest because he wanted his dinner; and he declared that he would fight the dog the next time he saw him.

Then they told me that they had seen a little girl in the wheat-field, gathering flowers, and that they had heard her sing most divinely—something about "Trip with me," and "the moon shining bright." And Softy said that he had learned part of the song, and that if we would give over prating so, and would listen to him, he would sing it as sweetly as the little girl did. So he sat up on his hinder parts, and began, "Trip with me, trip with me," but he made such a funny whistling noise through his long front teeth, that we all laughed till we cried. Then brother Softsides was angry, and bit my ear till I cried most bitterly, without laughing at all.

The next day, with the help of mamma, I managed to get down to the ground, and to climb up the bank; and in the wheat-field was the little girl again, singing her pretty song, and gathering wild-flowers in the hedge. But either because she had had more practice in singing than Softy, or because her front teeth were not so long as his, her performance was much more pleasing, to my ears at least, and I did not feel at all inclined to laugh at her. Presently, another little girl, who had been all the morning gleaning, came up to her, crying, and complaining that somebody had stolen a large bunch of wheat that she had collected and hid in a corner of the field. Then we saw that the young lady with the sweet voice had a sweet disposition also, for she gave the little gleaner her last sixpence, and sent her home as happy as a bird.



THE HARVEST-MICE.

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I was dreadfully tired with this expedition, and was quite lame for several days after, with a thorn in my left hind-foot, but at last mamma sucked it out for me. When it got well, I took courage to leave the nest again, and joined my brothers and sisters in their games of play, among the high grass, at the foot of the thistle, while mamma would sit on the nest, keeping watch lest some enemy should approach. As we became stronger and more courageous, we rambled further from home, and when the distance was not too great, I generally joined the party. All my family were now very kind to me, and I hope that I was less pettish in my behaviour to them, for mamma had convinced us how silly and wicked it is for brothers and sisters to quarrel with each other.

And now I must tell you of the dreadful fate of brother Softsides. Poor fellow! he was very vain of his running and leaping abilities, and at last he perished miserably by his

rashness. One fine afternoon, when we were more than half grown, Softsides, Tiney, and Sleek set off for a very long ramble along the hedge, nearly to the bottom of the field. I was too weak to join the party, but sister Sleek gave me a particular account of this unfortunate expedition. Softy was in very high spirits, and was trying to make Tiney lay wagers of so many grains of corn, about the distance he could leap. Fine fun they had, jumping and tumbling about; but at last they came to a place where some labourers had been dining, and had left a basket, with bread and cheese in it, and a small keg of beer, or cider. Our party made a glorious meal on the cheese, which was quite new food to them; and then Softsides said he would try to leap on to the keg, to enjoy the beautiful prospect. But sister Sleek begged him not to make the attempt, saying that she was sure he would come to some mischief if he did. Now I must tell you, that Sleek, though very demure and quiet in her manners, was considered to be much the most sensible of all our family; and indeed mamma, who was confined at home that day by a sprained ankle, had made her join this exploring party, in the hopes that she would keep the boys out of mischief.

"Now what harm can there possibly be in trying to jump on to this keg, I should like to know?" said Softsides; "but sister Sleek, or *Meek*, if you like that name better, you are always spoiling my fun."

"You may call me what name you like, Softy," replied his sister, "but I feel quite convinced in my own mind that if you don't take my advice, something dreadful will happen."

And sure enough something dreadful did happen—something very dreadful indeed: for poor brother Softsides, taking a run of about a couple of feet, jumped on to the fatal keg, pretty easily, but, alas! he never jumped down again! for the heat of the sun had forced the bung out, though we could not see this from the ground. Poor Softy saw it, when too late, for he could not save himself from tumbling down headlong into the keg, where he was soon drowned, while his brother and sister were horrified by hearing him screaming for assistance, which they could not possibly give him, and lamenting that he had not taken Sleek's advice.

So Tiney and his sister came back, frightened and sorrowful enough, and our cheerful home became a house of mourning. Mamma was in hysterics all night, and I verily thought we should have lost her. But sister Sleek, who knew something of the virtues of herbs, sent two of the boys into the wheat-field for a red poppy-head, which she persuaded mamma to eat, and soon after she became quiet, and slept all the next day and night. Then we were terribly afraid that she had taken so much of this powerful medicine that she would never wake again; and though Sleek said that she was not at all alarmed, I am sure she seemed very nervous and agitated, till at last our dear mother opened her eyes, and asked for some food.

In one corner of our field was an old deserted stable, which we sometimes visited, partly for the sake of a few horse-beans which we found on the floor, and partly to have a chat with a very odd creature who had taken up his abode there, and with whom we had formed a sort of acquaintance. This creature was an immense *toad*, a very strange companion, you will say, for a family of little mice. Certainly, he *was* an odd fellow, and a very ugly fellow too; but then he had the most beautiful eyes in the world, and I am sure he gave us very good advice, if we had been wise enough to have attended to it, instead of laughing at his croaking voice, and formal manner of talking.

The first time we visited the hermit, as we called him, after the loss of our brother, we were almost afraid to tell him of the accident, expecting he would say that poor Softsides was rightly served, and that we should all perish like him, by our folly, if we did not pay a little more attention to the advice of our elders. But Toady had a more feeling heart than you would have supposed from his manners and appearance, and when he had heard the sad tale to an end, and we were expecting a terrible lecture, he closed his searching eyes for a minute or two, and then said,

"Children, I commiserate your distress. My spirit is pained, yea, what if I say, sorely troubled and grieved, at this sad catastrophe! Unfortunate Softsides! truly he was a handsome juvenal, and active of limb withal. Know, my children, that he found favour in my sight, more especially inasmuch as I have sometimes thought that I resembled him not a little, both in feature and disposition, in the joyous days of my youth. Leave me now to meditate for a season upon this grievous visitation. In that corner you will find a few beans which I have collected for you. Peradventure, when you have finished them, I may relate some little tale or fable for your amusement. Yea, and for your instruction also, if you will receive it."

So when we had finished the luncheon which the good hermit had provided for us, we seated ourselves around the entrance of his hole, when, after a few minutes' recollection, and his usual preparation for a speech, by closing his eyes for a time, he related the following

FABLE OF THE SUNFLOWER AND THE MIGNIONETTE.

A gigantic Sunflower reared his many-headed stem very far above all the other plants in the parterre, and affected not a little to despise their lowly condition and insignificance. A bed of Mignonette, which grew close to him, particularly excited the anger of this arrogant fellow. And "what," exclaimed he, "could the stupid gardener be thinking of, when he planted such miserable, little half-starved wretches as you in the same border as a kingly Sunflower! Does not my very name declare my rank and noble origin, in token whereof, I never fail to pay my respects to the glorious lord of the skies, by turning my head towards him, whenever he deigns to remove the misty veil from his countenance? But as for you—— By the by, do you ever mean to blossom, or have you

the vanity to say, that those yellowish tufts (which at this height I can hardly distinguish from leaves) deserve the name of flowers? Ridiculous! I have a great mind to say, that if the mistress of this garden does not remove you, and some other of your vulgar companions, a little further off, I won't expand another blossom this summer; I'll kill myself in spite! I will, I declare!"

The Mignonette plants were so diverted at this threat, that for some time they could not reply to his abusive speech. At length one of them quietly said, "Vain babblers! to be angry at thy impertinence would prove that we were as silly as thyself. But know this, thou empty-pated, and worthless one,—though mean in appearance, and dwarfish in stature, we are nevertheless especial favourites with our mistress, who is so delighted with the rich perfume of our 'yellowish tufts,' as thou hast the impertinence to call them, that she frequently honours them with a place in her bosom. Flowers must be very scarce before any of thy huge gaudy-coloured blossoms attain to that envied situation, I trow. But thy pride will soon be humbled, for yesterday I overheard our mistress complaining of thy encroaching shade, and directing the gardener to root thee up, and cast thee forth, to rot like a vile weed upon the dunghill, that the more humble inhabitants of the flower-bed may benefit by the life-bestowing rays of that being whom we all worship, though we are not honoured, like thyself, by bearing his name. Lo! while I speak, the gardener draweth near with his spade, and thy destruction is at hand."

Our hermit was explaining to us how we might derive instruction from this fable, when suddenly a fierce weasel and a half-grown young one bounced in through the open doorway; but fortunately for us poor little mice they did not see us for half a minute, and this delay enabled the worthy Toady to save our lives. Scrambling out of his hole, with a great deal more activity than could be expected in such a corpulent old gentleman, he exclaimed, "Enter speedily, my children!" For once we followed his advice, without asking for a reason why; but we had hardly time to take refuge, when Mother Weasel espied the last tail whisking into the hole, and screeching out to her son, "A prey! a prey! I thought I smelt mice!" at a single bound she reached the entrance. She was too late, for our protector had backed his fat body into the hole, which he fitted so exactly, that the smallest beetle could hardly have passed him. "Friend Weasel," said he, "I dispute not that thou mayst have *smelt* mice, but this day shalt thou *taste* none, if my protection availeth anything. Verily, it appeareth to me that for once in thy life thou art balked."

Now you must know that most animals are rather afraid to attack a toad, believing that he is a magician, and has the power of injuring his enemies by spitting at them. Whether this be true or not I cannot say, but I am sure that our friend was the most quiet,

inoffensive creature on earth. But Mrs. Weasel seemed to think differently, for bounding away towards the door-way, she said to her son, "Come along, my boy! my nose tells me that they are nothing but little miserable harvest-mice. Let us try if we cannot meet with some of the great fat field-mice in the wheat-field, they are six times as large as these little wretches. For my part I am not at all hungry, but 'tis glorious fun hunting them to death."

But there was another animal close at hand, who was also very fond of hunting, and for the same reason; because he thought it was "*glorious fun*." This was the little terrier dog "Pepper," whose master, Farmer Winter, had come into the meadow that morning, to see how his sheep were getting on. Now it so happened that "Pep" took it into his random head to visit the stable, and he entered exactly as Mistress and Master W. were going out. Of course our situation prevented us from witnessing this interesting meeting, but we heard a scuffle, and two loud squeaks, which our protector, who saw the whole affair from the mouth of his den, informed us were the last sounds ever uttered by the long-backed mother and son. But though Pepper had kindly shaken our enemies to death, we did not like to trust ourselves in his power, thinking that he would most likely serve us in the same manner; so we remained quietly in the hole, till our kind friend had seen that the coast was clear, and then, having thanked him for his protection, we ran home as fast as possible.

We passed by the dead bodies of the weasels, and found that they were much handsomer animals than we had supposed, for though their backs were ridiculously long, their colours were very pretty; a beautiful reddish brown on the upper parts, but underneath they were as white as snow, or as your frock, my dear mistress. The hermit informed us afterwards, that they are the boldest animals for their size in the world, and that they will sometimes kill even young rabbits and hares. He said, that when a weasel attacks an animal so much larger than himself, he sticks fast to his neck, and though the poor creature runs away, he cannot get rid of his tormentor, but is soon exhausted and killed. Toady said, he once saw a weasel seized by a kite, and carried up into the air. After a little while, however, the bird began to fly very oddly, as if in pain, and at last fell down quite dead, close to the spot where the hermit was sitting. While he was in the air the weasel had killed the kite by gnawing a great hole in his side. So they both came down together, but the conqueror was not at all injured by his fall.

After our fortunate escape, nothing worth relating occurred till the day I was caught by that cruel boy from whose hands you so kindly rescued me. Being now nearly full grown our mother allowed us to take care of ourselves in the daytime, but she made two of my sisters and myself sleep in the nest with her at night.

One morning, wishing to see a little of the world, I set off by myself across the meadow, intending to visit a pleasant little wood we could just see from the bank above our house. But I had hardly reached the middle of the field, when a tremendous hail-storm came

on. Oh! what a dreadful predicament I was in! The sheep had eaten down the grass so close that it gave me no shelter whatever, neither could I find any hole or crack to creep into, till the storm was over. So I made the best of my way back again, though dreadfully bruised by the hail-stones, and at last a very heavy one struck me such a blow on the top of my head, that I was quite stunned; and I can remember nothing more, till I found myself in the hands of your papa's stable-boy, Tom. He had picked me up, when looking for mushrooms in the meadow, and thought perhaps that I should make a nice breakfast for his kitten. But when he found me come to life again, he said he would tame me, and make me draw a little pasteboard cart to amuse his sister Jenny. You cannot think how cruelly he used me, and how he made my lips bleed by forcing an iron bit into my mouth. And then he almost killed me by trying to make me swallow raw meat, which is a sort of food none of our species can abide. Truly, I should never have lived to have related this history, if you had not come into the stable-yard to see the young rabbits. Most fortunately for me, you were singing your favourite song. I remembered the words and the sweet clear voice instantly, and I said to myself, "Perhaps the young lady that was so kind to the little gleaner, may have compassion on a poor harvest-mouse." You know the rest: I squeaked with all my might; you heard me, and soon persuaded Tom to give up his prize in exchange for a dozen fine apples from your own little tree.

And now, my dear kind mistress, will you not fulfil your promise, and give me my liberty? I have been very happy with you, but I long exceedingly to return to the beautiful green bank again, and to see dear mamma, who must be dreadfully anxious about me, for it is now six days since I left the nest. Hold me up to your face, and let me read my fate in your beautiful eyes, which I declare are almost as bright and dark as my mother's. Bring me closer, quite close, for I am rather near-sighted. That will do. Oh joy! I see by those sweet sparklers, that my petition is granted, and that I shall sleep to-night by my mother's side in the downy nest on the thistle.

When this history was finished, Leatherwing said, that the little girl pressed her captive to her lips, and then, putting on her straw hat, she immediately walked out into the fields, with Minimus perched upon her hand.

⁹ When this was written, I was not aware that there existed in other countries a quadruped still more diminutive than our little harvest-

mouse. However, as "Minimus" declares that he was much smaller than others of his species, the title of his history may still be correct.

CHAPTER VII.

It was now the season for collecting nuts, acorns, and beech-mast; and it was time that the squirrels attended to the important business of filling their several storehouses with a supply of provisions for the winter.

Now their own oak would furnish acorns for hundreds of squirrels, and some beech-trees, laden with mast, were close at hand; but in order to procure hazle-nuts, their favourite food, it was necessary to go rather further from home. The nearest spot where the business of nutting could be carried on with much success, was a large hazel-copse, on the side of a hill, at the upper end of the valley. But the great difficulty was, how to obtain these nuts without risking their lives. For since the appearance of the wild-cat in the neighbourhood the squirrels had always avoided the thick bushes and underwood, knowing that she could more easily surprise them there, than among the open branches of large trees. Even in the trees they were very careful to look well about them, as they fully believed that the enemy was still in the neighbourhood, for Leatherwing, who had promised to give them early information, could hear no account of her having been killed. Indeed, he had very lately overheard a farmer complaining to a neighbour, that the night before, he had had three fine lambs killed, and several others sadly mangled by this destructive wild beast.

But to pass the tedious winter without a supply of nuts appeared as great a hardship to the squirrels as it would be to us to live for several months upon bread and water. Therefore, after several consultations on the subject, it was at length agreed, that *nuts they would have*, at all hazards; for said Brush, "Better to be eaten up by the wild-cat than starved." So one fine morning the whole party set off to the hazel-copse.

Now this reminds me of the happy hours I have myself passed in the woods, when I have joined a merry party of my young friends on one of those most joyful occasions, a *nutting expedition*. How can a day be passed more pleasantly? Oh! the delight of gathering the lovely brown clusters of five or six, or even sometimes seven or eight together! Then the dinner by the side of the clear stream, whose pure waters furnish not the least grateful part of the repast! and the notes of unrestrained merriment and joy, filling the woods with the echoes of sweet young voices! Even the torn frocks, and scratched hands and arms, are disregarded; and they are such common attendants upon these joyous expeditions, that to return from them with perfectly whole garments

and *skins*, would imply that the bag of nuts might have been heavier, if the party had been less fearful of the brambles and thorns. Now for the squirrels again.

The nuts were exactly in that state in which I like to find them—quite full and brown, and *almost* ready to fall out of their husks. But not *quite* ripe enough to do this, for then a great many are shaken out upon the ground, and lost. But the nuts were in perfection, and our party were employed the whole day in journeying backwards and forwards, between the hazel-copse and their storehouses in the old oak. No wild-cat or other enemy appeared, and the young squirrels began to think that their parents' continual cautions to be on the look out for this animal were unnecessary.

The next day the party were again hard at work, and even the old squirrels were so busily employed in filling their own mouths, and in teaching their children how to select the ripest and soundest nuts, that they seemed almost to have forgotten that they had a single enemy in the world. They had already made several journeys, and were now eagerly engaged in some large old hazel-trees, close to a wide pathway, which had been cut through the wood for the convenience of the sportsmen. Suddenly Brush perceived, partly concealed among the thick underwood, a dark, fearful-looking object, which—*could* it be the dreaded foe, or was it only the brown trunk of a tree? He was not long in doubt, for now the head of the monster appeared from among the leaves, and then those savage eyes! having once seen them how could he possibly mistake their terrible glances? Brush was so frightened, that he absolutely allowed three remarkably fine nuts to fall out of his mouth upon the ground, and at last he gave the note of alarm. "Fly all of you," cried he, "the enemy is close at hand!" Then he recovered sufficient presence of mind to remember how he had himself escaped from his pursuer in the oak, and he desired his family to retreat to the small outer branches of the trees, where they would but just support their weight, for he knew that the young ones were too small and weak to make their escape by flight.

But this clever plan did not succeed so well in these low nut-trees as among the lofty branches of the oak, where a tumble to the ground would most likely have broken some of the adversary's bones. The cunning beast appeared to understand the difference between the two situations, but for a minute or two she remained motionless, as if she were planning the best way of making her attack. At last, with a single bound she was in the tree. She fearlessly dashed at one of the young squirrels, who sat trembling at the farther end of a branch, overhanging the pathway; it gave way beneath her weight, and both animals fell to the ground below. But while the poor little squirrel was so shaken by the fall that he could only crawl slowly away, the cat, like all animals of her kind, pitched unhurt upon her feet, ¹⁰ and was just upon the point of seizing her prey in her terrible hooked claws, when bang!—the report of a gun from the adjoining thicket.

Here I must inform you, that Harvey, the gamekeeper, who had long been looking out for the destroyer, had this morning been informed by some boys who were nutting in

the copse, that they had seen her running across an open space, with a fine cock pheasant in her mouth. Now the keeper had found, from his experience on two former occasions, that it was useless to fire small shot at an animal who had such a defence in her thick close fur, and who was too wary to allow him to approach very near. Therefore, giving his double-barrelled fowling-piece into the hands of his son, a lad of about fourteen, who accompanied him, he armed himself with a *rifle*, which is a gun made on purpose for throwing bullets very accurately, to a long distance. He left all his dogs at home, thinking they would be of more harm than use.

Harvey and his boy had already been some hours in the wood, and were beginning to think that they had received false information, when young Dick, who was a remarkably sagacious, intelligent fellow, suddenly stopped his father, and pointed to some trees at a little distance.

"Well, lad," whispered Harvey, "what dost see now?"

"Look at those squirrels, father!"

"I see 'em plain enough, but it won't do. Though if it wasn't for master's orders, I should like to try the rifle upon one of 'em, I must say."

"No, no, father," replied Dick, "that isn't what I mean. But only look at them! They aint eating, nor doing nothing, but they have all got their heads one way, and they stick themselves up as if they were frightened at something. Depend upon it, father, the wild-cat isn't far from those squirrels, if she is in the wood at all."

"*I see!*" replied his father: "that's as bright a thought as ever came into thy head, son Dick! But we have no chance among these plaguy thick bushes. We must creep quietly out into the path, and then perhaps we may get a shot at the varmint."

So the two cat-hunters concealed themselves behind a tree, by the side of the path, and just as the wild-cat was pouncing upon her prey, a ball from the keeper's well-directed rifle laid her howling upon the ground, with the bone of her hind-leg smashed to atoms.

But he who supposes that one of these ferocious animals is conquered merely because her leg is broken, will find himself very much mistaken. A wild-cat conquered! no, indeed! You may kill her, but she *never yields*, so long as she has any life remaining. And so Harvey found to his cost. For when he saw the animal rolling upon the ground, supposing her to be mortally wounded, he ran up towards her, intending to finish the affair with a blow from the butt end of his rifle. Now this imprudent conduct proved that he had never encountered a wounded wild-cat before. No sooner had he approached within a few yards of her, than, regardless of her broken leg, she sprang upon him like a fury, and before he could aim a blow at her, she was at his throat, with her fore-legs clasped round his neck.

Frightful! only imagine the horrors of such an embrace! In vain poor Harvey strove with all his might to cast off the savage creature from him, and I cannot tell how the affair might have ended, if Dick had not been at hand to render assistance. Waiting for a favourable opportunity, he put the muzzle of his gun close to the creature's body, and firing both barrels at once, in his eagerness to do the business effectually, he made such a terrible hole in her side, that, if she had had nine hundred lives, instead of the usual moderate number of nine, they would all have taken flight through the wound in an instant. She fell to the ground, a mangled, blackened corpse.

And how did poor Harvey escape? Better than could have been expected, considering the powerful teeth and claws of his adversary. To be sure, he was pretty severely bitten and scratched, but his wounds were not dangerous; and when he had recovered his breath, and wiped the blood from his face, the first thing he did was to stretch his vanquished foe at her full length upon the ground. Then laying his rifle by her side, he said to Dick, "She's full four feet long, if she's an inch, and I have gained my wager! I laid a bet of a guinea, with Lord What's-his-name's keeper, that she would turn out to be four feet long, and so she is, and more, as I can tell by the length of this barrel. But only look at her teeth, Dick, and her terrible claws!"

"And what a great bushy tail!" said Dick, rubbing it through his hands; "and see, father, 'tis the same size from end to end, and quite black at the tip, just as that learned stranger gentleman up at the hall said that all real wild-cats were."

"A learned gentleman! Let me tell thee, son Dick, if thee hadst had thy face and hands clawed to pieces like mine are, thee wouldst have said the varmint was *wild* enough, in all conscience, without waiting for any *learned gentleman* to tell thee so. How my face do smart to be sure! And look at my new jacket! All burnt and torn to pieces! 'T was a wonder my arm wasn't blown off too. Well, boy, 't was a bold shot, and I can't tell what I should have done if somebody hadn't been by. But come, throw the beast over thy shoulder. I must go home and get mother to put some plaister on these bites and scratches."

At the very beginning of this fierce conflict, all the squirrels, except the father of the family, fled from the scene of action, and in five minutes they were safe in the nest. But Brush was so determined to see the end of the affair, that he remained concealed in the hazel-tree, till Dick had fired the finishing shot; and then, being convinced that he had nothing more to fear from his old enemy, he scampered off to his home, to relate what he had seen.

10 It is well known that cats have the power of turning themselves over in the air, so as to bring their legs undermost, when they fall, or are thrown, from a height; but how this desirable change of position is brought about or maintained, it is not very easy to explain. One would have supposed that the centre of gravity would have brought the *back* undermost. To prove that these animals *do* possess the power of turning over in the air, take a cat, or a kitten, and hold her by her four feet, two in each of your hands, with her back downwards, at about the height of the table from the ground. Now if you open both your hands suddenly, your assistant in the experiment will change her position almost as quickly as a shuttlecock turns round when struck by the battledore, and will alight safely on her feet. But if you hold her at a *very short* distance from the ground, poor puss will not have time to execute her clever feat, and will fall on her back. Therefore, for her sake, practise this experiment *over a bed*.

CHAPTER VIII.

I have not much more to tell you about "Squirrels and other Animals," for by the time the tenants of the oak-tree had collected a good stock of provisions, the weather had become rather cold and dismal, and it seemed likely that the winter would set in very early that year. But the time for their long sleep was not yet quite arrived, and on fine days they were still to be seen abroad, roaming about from tree to tree, and sometimes bringing home a few more nuts and acorns. But to find these they were now obliged to search on the ground, for the wind had shaken the ripe fruit from the trees. Now they were relieved from the dread of being seized by their terrible enemy, they could ramble about where they pleased.

One day as they were rummaging about among the dry leaves, under the hazel-bushes, the squirrels fell in with the very oddest creature they had ever seen. They had heard from Leatherwing that such an animal lived in the woods, but they did not think they should ever meet with him, as the bat had told them that he never came abroad till it was dark. But the old fellow was mistaken a little for once in his life, for here this most extraordinary looking creature certainly was, in the middle of the day. 11 From the description Brush had received of this animal, he knew at once that he was one *Touchmenot*, a hedgehog; and that though he was considered to be rather a queer-tempered fellow, he was not likely to do him any harm. But the young squirrels and

their mother were so frightened at his very warlike appearance, that they leaped up into the bushes overhead.



THE SQUIRREL AND THE HEDGEHOG.

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Brush remained on the ground, but his family observed that he took care to keep close to the stem of a small tree, for he thought that if his new acquaintance should become uncivil, he could not possibly climb up after him. After the two animals had looked at each other for some time in silence, Touchmenot began the conversation.

TOUCHMENOT.

Well! what d'ye stare at? What d'ye want? Never saw me before, eh? Hope you will remember me when we meet again, for you have looked at me long enough, I am sure, with those great black eyes of yours.

Oh! don't be frightened! You may stare at me till you are blind for all I care. I'm not ashamed of myself. Oh dear no! Well, now you have examined me pretty well, who d'ye think I am, eh?

BRUSH.

(Rather frightened at the surly address of the stranger).

I believe you are called Mr. Touchmenot, are you not, Sir?

TOUCHMENOT.

Touchmenot, indeed! What fool told you that? Well, I don't care, they may call me so if they please. Ha! ha! no bad name neither! *Touch me not*, I advise you, or you will smart for it! So *that's* the name they give me, is it? Oh, with all my heart! And what else have you heard about me, Mr. Greateyes?

BRUSH.

Oh, nothing very particular. Yes, now I recollect, I have heard that you have got a very odd way of defending yourself, by rolling up into a ball, when you see any animal coming that you think is an enemy.

TOUCHMENOT.

That I *think* is an enemy? I consider *all* animals my enemies. Except my own family, I don't believe I have a friend in the world. My comfort is, that I am very well able to take care of myself; and yet I can neither fly like a bird, nor run like a hare, nor swim like a fish, nor leap like yourself. No, I can do none of these; but I can *roll up*, and so set all my enemies at defiance; and I had half a mind to have done so when I first saw you, but it was hardly worth while, for you are much smaller than I am, and, besides, to tell you the truth, you look rather like a good-tempered fellow. Now what other tales have you heard about my doings?

BRUSH.

Why if you wont be angry, I was going to say, though I didn't believe it at the time, but I *have* heard it said that you are *rather fond of milk*, and don't mind sucking the farmers' cows sometimes.

TOUCHMENOT.

So you have heard that ridiculous story, have you? Well, you say you don't believe it, so I sha'n't take the trouble to prove what a monstrous fib it is. Now then, I'll tell you what I have heard about *you*. I have heard that you *are rather fond of nuts*, and that, not content with eating as many as you can possibly cram, you are such a glutton that you carry a great many home with you, on purpose to stuff yourself with in the winter.

BRUSH.

Well, and what harm? Nuts are very wholesome food, I am sure. And don't *you* lay up any store of provisions for the winter, then?

TOUCHMENOT.

Not I, indeed! I am better employed in the winter than in eating. I sleep *all* the winter, Mr. Nutcracker! When the weather gets a little colder, perhaps in a few days, I shall creep into my snug nest which I have made under the roots of a great tree. There I shall roll myself up, in my bed of dry leaves, and when once fairly asleep, I am safe till next spring. Nothing can make *me* wake up. What a fool I should be to trouble myself about collecting a quantity of food for the winter, when I am sound asleep all the time!

BRUSH.

And what do you live upon, when you *are* awake, if it isn't an unfair question?

TOUCHMENOT.

Oh, I am not very particular. Almost anything will do at a pinch. I often make a meal upon roots and vegetables, when I can find nothing else. But I like animal food much better, such as insects, worms, snails, bird's eggs, frogs, mice, and now and then I dine upon a snake when I can contrive to catch him. Well! what's the matter now? What do you jump up into the tree for?

BRUSH.

Oh, shocking! I never heard anything so dreadful in my life! I beg your pardon. I mean, I should not like to dine upon snake at all.

TOUCHMENOT.

Very likely not. Tastes differ, you know. But here comes a gentleman who will most certainly *dine upon you*, if you don't get up a little higher into the tree; for though he can't climb, he is a pretty good leaper. For my part, I scorn to run away from any animal, large or small. Stay where you are, and you will see some fun.

The animal that now approached was a hungry young fox, who would certainly have made a meal of the squirrel if he could have caught him. But after trying to reach him, by jumping till he was tired, he gave it up at last for a bad job; and then, spying the hedgehog, he dashed at him, as if he had intended to have swallowed him at a single mouthful. But Touchmenot was quite prepared for the attack, for he had rolled himself up into a round ball, with nothing but sharp spines sticking out on every side; and when the fox attempted to seize his prey, you would have laughed to have seen how very much surprised and disappointed he looked. As he was but young, though he appeared more than half-grown, I suppose he had never seen a hedgehog before, or he would not have acted so imprudently, for he pounced upon this ball of spines as he would upon a rabbit, or a pheasant, but he soon found out his mistake, and retreated to a little distance, howling dismally, and licking his bleeding lips and nose.

When he recovered a little from his surprise, he made another attempt. But now he proceeded more cautiously, and rolled old Touchmenot over and over with his paws, hoping to find some part of him that was not protected by this spiny coat of armour. He could make nothing of it! This strange-looking ball was spines above, spines below—strong, sharp spines on every side. It was really very provoking, for it contained a nice meal inside, no doubt, if he could but get at it.

After watching his vain attempts for some time, the squirrels saw that the fox had no chance of succeeding, and they made the best of their way home, keeping on the trees for fear he should leave Touchmenot, and follow them instead. However, they had nothing to fear from this silly young fellow, for he seemed fully occupied in rolling this tiresome ball about, but how long he continued his amusement, I cannot tell. However, I must inform you, that the hedgehog boasted rather too much, when he said he could set *all* his enemies at defiance, by his strange plan of defence; for though very few animals will venture to attack him when rolled up, it sometimes happens that a thoroughly game and courageous terrier-dog will seize him, and kill him too, in spite of his prickly armour. Of course, his own lips and mouth must suffer severely from the animal's sharp spines.

A week or two after the interview with the hedgehog, one very cold dismal afternoon, all the squirrels were in the nest, except the father of the family, and he was gone abroad for a short time, just to stretch his legs a little. Suddenly he darted into the hole, as if he had been pursued by another wild-cat, and when he was asked what was the matter, he exclaimed, "*Snow!* cold, dismal *snow!* Flakes of snow as large as white butterflies, and falling so thickly that I could hardly see my way back to the nest! Here I am, however, and here I mean to stay till fine weather comes again. It will be a long while before that happens though, I fancy."

Brush was a true prophet. The weather became colder and colder every day, till at last, after a sharp frosty night, the squirrels quite forgot to wake up in the morning, and then

their first long nap of several weeks began. If you could have looked in upon them in their comfortable nest, you could hardly have believed that the little curled up squirrels, with their blankets over their heads, were the same active, playful creatures, whose summer gambols among the branches had afforded you so much amusement.

Well, then, there *can* be nothing more to say about these sleeping squirrels, and now I must inform you what effect the cold weather had upon the other animals, whose summer habits have been imperfectly described in this history. The dormice, in their nests at the bottom of the oak-tree, and the water-rats, in their holes in the bank of the pond, were sound asleep also; but all these animals had taken the precaution to provide a store of provisions for the early part of the spring, and in case they should wake up for a few days in the winter. Now, with respect to the curious little water-shrew-mouse, Velvet-coat, I am not quite so certain about his winter habits. But no doubt he slept comfortably in his hole till the spring; and as he was an insect-feeder, we may conclude that he followed the example of Touchmenot, in not laying up any food for the winter.

If we could have questioned old Leatherwing, I think he would have told us that the harvest-mice, whose history he overheard related by Minimus, abandoned their nest on the thistle, and made themselves a warmer house, deep under the ground, where they passed the cold weather in sleeping, and now and then nibbling the grains of wheat which they had buried with them. The bat has already related how he passed the winter himself, and how he was obliged to waste some part of it in sleep, not altogether from the effects of cold, but also from the want of food.

¹¹ I can bear witness, that hedgehogs are not always nocturnal animals, having more than once seen them running about in the daytime, and I remember capturing one that was trotting across the corner of a field when the mid-day sun was shining brightly. And if the hedgehog occasionally kills snakes, as Mr. Bell informs us, how can he meet with these animals by night, when they are invariably safe in their holes?

CHAPTER IX.

Though the history of the squirrels and their companions was finished in the last chapter, I still feel unwilling to part from my young friends, who have kindly taken some interest in the events I related for their amusement. It is true, that in the following tale no mention will be made of any of those "smaller British quadrupeds" of whose "habits and instincts" the title-page has engaged to communicate some information. But it is always better to do *more* than *less* than we have promised. Therefore, perhaps you will not be displeased if this little book should contain something that you did not expect to find there, and I hope you will think this additional chapter not less entertaining than those you have already read.

You may remember, that Leatherwing related to the squirrel the History of Minimus, or "Some Passages in the Life of the smallest Quadruped in the World." In the following pages, you will find a companion to the bat's story, and the title shall be,

SOME PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF THE LARGEST QUADRUPED IN THE WORLD!

As inquisitive readers may perhaps wish to be informed by what means the following little history came into my possession, I will endeavour to satisfy them as to its authenticity, by telling them that it was related to me by an old man, a native of Sumatra, in which island, "the largest quadrupeds in the world" are, or were, abundant in a wild state. This old fellow was cook on board the ship, "All's Well," in which (fifty-three years ago,) I first went to sea as an apprentice, and he was called "Jolly," but what his real name was no one on board knew nor cared. He was a merry-hearted old man, and had made himself a great favourite, especially with us boys, by his extraordinary abilities in "*spinning a good yarn*," as the sea-phrase goes, meaning neither more nor less than telling a good story. The following strange history was a favourite "yarn" of old Jolly's; and though it is now more than half a century since I first heard it, it is still fresh in my memory, having so often related it to my little brothers, who, on my return home, were always very eager in their inquiries about "the doings of the dreadful wild-beasts of foreign countries."

But I must mention, that our old friend Jolly boasted of other accomplishments more extraordinary than story-telling, such as the art of foretelling future events, of understanding the language of birds and beasts, and he sometimes hinted, that he had the dangerous power of killing an enemy who might be five hundred leagues distant, by the performance of certain magical ceremonies. Perhaps you are not disposed to believe that Jolly was such a clever old fellow. Well, I cannot help it. I have no time now to endeavour to convince you, but here is his story, though not in his own words, for if I had not corrected his bad English, the narrative would be almost unintelligible to those who were not accustomed to his extraordinary mixture of languages.

(JOLLY *begins his Story.*)

Tell you about the elephants again? Why, I have given you a dozen stories at least about them this voyage! Well, if you must have it, here goes.

You must know, then, that about two years before, (like a great fool that I was,) I left my dear native island: I accompanied my father, and twenty or thirty of our tribe, on an elephant-catching expedition, to the banks of a large river more than fifty miles from our village. We were five days on our journey, for we had to pass through deep and tangled forests. As our object was merely to procure the valuable tusks, which we bartered at the Dutch settlement, for linen cloth, and other European articles, we did not attempt to take our game alive, but contented ourselves with digging deep pit-falls in the forest-paths made by the elephants in their visits to the river-side; for you must know that elephants are very fond of bathing and splashing about in the water. These pits of ours were slightly covered over with branches of trees and grass, and at the bottom we fixed a strong, sharp-pointed stake, on which, when they tumbled down headlong, the unwieldy animals were impaled and killed. We always took care to bait our traps with green boughs and tempting fruits. When we were so fortunate as to entrap an elephant in this manner, some of our party would descend to cut out the valuable tusks with a hatchet; and as we were quite unable to raise the immense carcass out of the pit, we were obliged to fill it up and dig another.

This method of catching elephants was generally adopted by our nation, for at that time fire-arms were not in use among us. But I have heard that in some countries, when the hunters wish to take the animals alive, they make large enclosures of very strong stakes, and employ tame elephants to entice the wild ones inside, when the door is shut, and they are immediately bound fast with ropes, and kept without food for several days, till they are partly tamed. But I must return to our expedition.

At this time we were very unfortunate indeed. Though the herd of elephants was numerous, and we had dug a great number of pit-falls, more than a week had passed, and we had made only one capture, a very young animal whose tusks were hardly worth taking home. This bad luck was not occasioned by our want of skill, for some of our party, my father and elder brother in particular, were the most experienced hunters of our nation, and our traps were covered over and baited with the greatest care. It was of no use; after the little fellow who met with his fate on the second day of our falling in with the herd, not a single elephant would venture his life for the most tempting baits we could select; and in some places where the path was so narrow that there was no room to pass the trap, these provoking animals would either return, or make another

track by the side of it, by tearing up the trees with their trunks, and trampling down the bushes and underwood.

"This will never do!" said my father; "these rascals are too cunning for us. We must find another herd. If we do not get some ivory soon, the Dutch ships will have left the port, and then we shall not be able to sell our tusks for a pretty while."

So it was agreed, that the next day we would move further up the river, in hopes of falling in with a less sagacious herd. But the same afternoon a circumstance occurred which explained the cause of our want of success in a very satisfactory manner, to *me* at least, though some of our company were so stupid as to say that what I am now going to relate was all nonsense, and that I had been dreaming.

I was stationed in the upper part of a lofty tree within view of one of our pit-falls, when I perceived three elephants approaching. Two were of moderate size, but the third was by far the largest animal I had ever seen or heard of. He seemed almost decrepit with age, and had a very remarkable appearance, from one of his immense tusks being broken off, leaving a ragged stump of about a foot in length. He and his companions had been enjoying a cool bathe in the river, as I could perceive from the light-coloured mud on their legs and sides, and their way lay directly by the trap I was appointed to watch. But this peril they took especial care to avoid. However, I observed the old elephant point at it with his trunk, whereupon they all three tossed up their heads with an indignant snort. So they paced leisurely along till they reached my tree, at the foot of which, the old gentleman, apparently exhausted with fatigue, threw himself down on his side so suddenly, that he occasioned a partial earthquake. The others kept watch by him.

After lying perfectly still for about an hour, during which time, we may safely conclude that he was refreshed by a comfortable nap, the venerable patriarch raised his immense bulk till he was in a sort of squatting posture, and began to converse with his companions; but I was at such a great height above him, that I could only catch a word or two here and there. But what are you laughing at, Bill Stacey? Do you think everybody is as deaf and as stupid as yourself? You had better say at once that you don't believe I could understand the elephant's language, and then I'll leave off and turn in for the rest of the watch. Well, then, behave yourself, my boy, and don't interrupt me any more, or I won't say another word to-night.

Let me see, where was I? Oh, I told you that I was too high up in the tree to make out what the elephants were saying, but no doubt their conversation related to the pitfall, as the old fellow grumbled out the words, "stupid idiots!" "shallow contrivance!" and "whoever saw fruit growing on a beaten path?" Hoping to gain some useful information, I now, with extreme caution, descended from the top of the tree till I reached a branch about twenty feet from the ground, and concealed myself among the thick leaves. For

some time after I had been in this situation there was a dead silence below, and I almost feared that the elephants had heard or smelt me, and were meditating some mischief. But there was a strong breeze blowing, and this prevented them from hearing me. In a few minutes, the patriarch, after casting a very affectionate glance on his companions, and giving utterance to a tremendous grunt, which I suppose he meant for a *sigh*, though you might have heard it at the distance of a mile, began a sort of history of his life, which I will repeat, if Bill Stacey will be quiet.

(The old ELEPHANT speaks for himself at last.)

True, my dear children, I have often promised to relate to you as much as I can remember of my long life and experience, and as my increasing bodily infirmities warn me that my days are drawing to a close, I cannot do better than embrace this opportunity when we are not likely to be interrupted by our companions.

I am now going to put you in possession of a secret, which I should be very unwilling to make public. It is universally believed by our company, that I have spent many years in the service of man, and that at this period of my life, I acquired that knowledge of his ways which has been so useful in enabling me to detect and avoid his wicked devices for the destruction of our noble race. To this belief I am indebted for the influence I possess in our councils, and though my years and experience might still be respected, I am certain, that the ungrateful herd, ever fond of change, would immediately choose a new leader, if they had the least suspicion of what I am going to communicate to you.

Know, then, my children, that I have never been a slave to the tyrant! that I have never been that most abject of creatures, "*a tame elephant*." No! my last days are not embittered by the consideration, that I have ever in the smallest degree contributed to the happiness of the two-legged monster. On the contrary, I am cheered by the recollection, that a great part of my life has been spent in detecting his tricks, and in thwarting his wicked designs. If our laws did not forbid us to take the life of any creature except in self-defence, with my knowledge of our enemies' weakness, we might easily take such terrible vengeance, as would induce him at least to confine himself to the neighbourhood of his own towns and settlements. But he cannot do us much injury. So successful have I been in detecting his ridiculous traps and pit-falls, that, for the last fifty years, not one of our herd has fallen a victim to his vile designs, except the poor young creature who threw his life away a few days ago, when, foolishly confident in his own knowledge, he persisted in rambling about by himself. Even in this melancholy affair, we may comfort ourselves that we could better spare him than any other of his companions, and that our enemies have gained little or nothing by his capture.

But you will ask, if I have never been the companion of man, by what means have I obtained that superior intelligence and knowledge of his arts, for which our tribe are pleased to give me credit? I answer, simply by keeping my *eyes* and my *ears* open, and by remembering what I have *seen* and *heard*. Follow my example, my dear children, and if you ever arrive at my age, you will no longer wonder at the extent of my information.

Now let me endeavour to remember some of the most remarkable incidents of my life. I have but a confused recollection of my very early childhood, or of anything that happened before my thirteenth year, but about that time I well remember I was in terrible distress at the loss of my first tusks, and that my mother could hardly make me believe that they would ever be replaced by others. But when these long-looked-for second tusks really made their appearance, and had reached about the length of my present miserable stump, I used to plague all my acquaintance, by asking them whether they thought my tusks had grown lately, or whether they would ever be as large and strong as our leader's. At last I met with a cutting reproof from a surly old fellow, who had often been pestered by me in this manner.

"You impertinent young scamp," said he, "what do I care about your tusks, or whether they grow or not? One thing I know, and will tell you for your comfort. If, when you grow up, your head should be as deficient in *ivory* as it is in *sense*, you need have no fear whatever of the hunters, for I am sure you would not repay them for the trouble of killing you."

This was very severe; but I must tell you that the old brute was particularly cross on this occasion, for the day before he had been terribly disappointed by not being chosen leader of the herd, and he had found out, as I was afterwards informed, that he had lost his election by the influence of my mother and some others of our family.

Well, my children, if I was once proud of my tusks, I have no cause for such foolish vanity now with this hideous stump, though the other is still nearly half as long again as any in the herd.

I will now relate to you how I first became acquainted with that contemptible little animal, who has the vanity to call himself "the lord of the creation." I think it was in my twentieth year, just at the end of the rainy season, that our herd had approached within less than fifty miles of the Dutch settlement, for the purpose of visiting a tract of marshy land overrun with high canes, the tender tops of which, you well know, are such delicious food. I was busily employed in a cane-brake, close to the banks of the river, in company with my mother and two of my younger brothers, when one of the latter, who had left us for a few minutes to wash the clammy juice of the canes from his mouth and trunk, returned in such haste and agitation, that for some time not a sound could he utter, except unintelligible gruntings and sputterings. At last, he stammered out,

"Mother! mother! dreadful! I have seen such a thing! Great monstrous monkeys, with long poles in their paws, and sitting upright on the backs of immense deer, or some such creatures, only they have got no horns on their heads!"

Upon this, my mother, raising her trunk high in the air, immediately sounded the well-known signal of alarm, and saying to us, "Follow, boys, follow!" she darted through the cane-brake like a mad thing, only stopping now and then to see how we kept up with her. We did our best; but it was very laborious work, forcing our way at our utmost speed through the thick canes, which were much higher than our heads, and in some places; the ground was so soft, that we sunk in up to our bellies. What a tremendous crash and splash we made, and how we did grunt and snort! However, at last we reached the open country, two or three miles from the bank of the river. Here we found more than half of the herd, (we were seventy-five in number at that time,) and others were every minute making their appearance from the canes. And now my mother, when she had a little recovered her breath, turning to my brother who had first given the alarm, explained to us the cause of this sudden retreat. "My son," said she, "not *monkeys* sitting upon *deer* have you seen, but *men* upon *horses*, and the *long poles* are *cruel spears* intended for your destruction."

Our careful leader now called over the names of his company, and finding that two were missing, he ordered us to retreat to a thick wood at a short distance, while himself and his brother, a steady sedate old fellow, entered the cane-brake again, in hopes of falling in with the lost ones. Being now collected together, we did not fear the enemy, who is too cowardly to attack any but stragglers from the main body; but we were very anxious about the fate of our missing friends, especially as they were both rather young and giddy.

In about an hour we perceived the leader and his brother issuing from the cane-brake, supporting between them one of the stragglers, who appeared quite unable to walk by himself, and as they came near, we could see that he was bleeding from several wounds in his body, and that he had lost the use of one of his hind-legs.

But what a dreadful account he gave us! He said that he and his brother, whose name was Brisk, were feeding in an open space close to the river, when they heard my mother's alarm-call, which Brisk said was nothing more than her usual voice when she was scolding her children. So he refused to retreat, and persuaded his brother to remain with him, when suddenly they found themselves surrounded by ten or twelve hunters mounted on horse-back, and armed with long spears. They made the best resistance they could, and killed one of the hunters; but at length our wounded friend, finding himself weak from his wounds, rolled down the steep bank into the river, where he was concealed by the overhanging trees, and as the cold water refreshed and strengthened him, he swam gently down the stream, keeping close under the bank till he came to a good landing-place. Here, he with difficulty managed to scramble on shore, and was

proceeding slowly and in great pain through the canes, when he was found by the leader and his brother, without whose assistance he said he should never have reached the herd, for he was bleeding fast, and a deep spear-wound in the upper joint of his hind-leg was becoming more and more painful at every step.

After his wounds had been examined, and the bleeding had been stopped by the application of the proper herbs, our poor friend was questioned as to the fate of his brother, when he immediately swooned from excess of agitation. Recovering a little, in a low voice and in broken words he endeavoured to communicate the sad tidings.

"Brother," said he, "brother Brisk—brother Brisk barbarously"—then suddenly, to our amazement, jumping up on his three legs, he bellowed forth with tremendous energy, "Brother Brisk barbarously butchered!" Whereupon the whole herd, old and young, with quivering trunks high raised in air, continued for some minutes to thunder forth in their loudest tones, "Brother Brisk barbarously butchered! Brother Brisk barbarously butchered!"

Did that wild cry of despair reach the ears of the hunters? If so, I envy them not their feelings.

We continued in a close body all night with watchful sentinels on the look-out. The next morning a council was held, from which my youth excluded me; but we were soon informed, that our elders had determined that we should retreat fifty or a hundred miles up the river, not (as they were very particular in declaring) that they had any fear of the enemy themselves, but on account of the number of young ones in the herd, who, by wandering to a distance from the rest, would run great risk of sharing the fate of poor Brisk. So, after waiting three or four days for our wounded companion to recover a little, we set off on our journey, keeping near the banks of the river, for the sake of the canes and the opportunity of bathing. On the second day, coming to a narrow part of the river, we determined to cross it as a greater security. It was so shallow, that most of us could walk on the bottom with our trunks raised above the surface of the water to breathe through, but the very young ones either swam or were helped over by their mothers.

When we were all collected together, we heard a loud shout from the opposite bank of the river, and lo! there were our enemies again, eight in number, mounted on horses, and with their long steel lances glittering in the sun. They had no doubt been following us closely all day, looking out for stragglers. Some of our company who had complained bitterly of our leader's strict discipline in obliging us to march in a close body, now began to look rather silly. In a few minutes, another horseman who appeared more heavily laden than his companions rode up to them, and, oh! sight of horror! from his saddle were hanging a pair of tusks, which no doubt a few days before had adorned the head of the unfortunate Brisk!

After looking at us for some time, one of the hunters, more courageous or more foolish than his companions, rode into the river as far as his horse could go without swimming, till he was nearly half-way across, and then, for the first time in my life, I had a full view of the human form and countenance.

Never before had I seen such a ridiculous object as this hunter, who was pronounced to be an Englishman by some knowing ones in our company. He was larger, certainly, than our amusing friends the monkeys, but his pale face was not half so agreeable and intelligent, and as he sat on his horse with his long thin legs dangling in the water, he looked so disappointed and miserable, that, forgetting for a moment his villanous cruelty, I almost pitied him. And so much for "the majesty of the human countenance" which I have heard spoken of, but could never yet perceive. It has been said that a bold man can subdue the rage even of the ferocious tiger, merely by fixing his eye upon him. Very likely, for the tiger is as cowardly as he is cruel; but did anybody ever hear of an *elephant*, old or young, being frightened at a couple of little twinkling eyes? Oh! most absurd!

After a little while the monkey—I mean the man in the river—joined his companions on the bank, and when they had consulted together, they seemed to give it up as a bad job. So they rode back down the river, and we proceeded quietly on our journey.

It was more than fifty years after this adventure before I again encountered any of these savage disturbers of the peace of the wilderness, though we often heard of them from herds who had lost some of their number by the treacherous devices of the enemy. During this long period of tranquillity, so little occurred worth noticing, that I shall leave the relation of this part of my life till another opportunity, and hasten to give you an account of my next interview with man, on which occasion it was that I began those observations on his manner of making pit-falls, and other contrivances for our destruction, which have been of such service in enabling us to avoid these dangers. At this time, instead of losing one of our companions, we had the pleasure of rescuing a member of another community from a lingering and dreadful death.

We were quite on the other side of the island, several hundred miles from the scene of the last tragedy. For some days we had been aware of the neighbourhood of man from the smell of his watch-fires, and accordingly we had doubled the number of our sentinels, and had taken care not to wander far from each other. But we neither saw nor heard anything of the enemy until about noon of a burning hot day, when, as we were sheltering ourselves from the sun in a thick wood, we were suddenly startled by loud shouts and yells, so discordant and hideous, that we were sure they could be produced by no other animal but man. To these cries we paid little attention, but presently was heard in the same direction another sound—a sound which caused our very hearts to burn within us, as we recognised the peculiar cry which a female of our own species utters when in terrible distress and danger. A hasty council was immediately called,

when it was determined to rescue the sufferer at all hazards, and twenty strong fellows, myself having the command of the party, set off at full speed through the wood in the direction of the cries,—every one of us bellowing as loud as we were able.

A very short time sufficed to bring us within sight of the enemy. In an open part of the forest was a troop of twenty or thirty hunters, but very different in their appearance from those I have before described; for these were nearly naked savages, on foot, and armed only with those ridiculous things, bows and arrows—weapons which our good stout skins enable us to laugh at. These wretches, as soon as they caught sight of our formidable band, took to their heels in great confusion, flying in every direction, like a herd of antelopes before the cruel tiger; we did not deign to follow them, but hastened at once to the spot they had left. Here we found a deep pit-fall, and at the bottom was an exceedingly beautiful and very black female elephant unhurt by the fall, for the pit being large, she had fortunately escaped the murderous sharp-pointed stake, and her cry of distress was soon exchanged for one of joyful recognition, as she saw so many of her friends looking down upon her, and assuring her that they would leave no means untried to rescue her from her prison. But this was a much more difficult matter than we had supposed; for the pit was so deep, that, when the captive stood up on her hind-legs, her eyes were but just level with the ground, and though we made many efforts to lift her out with our trunks, our attempts were always ended by our poor friend's tumbling back again with great violence into the pit, and nearly pulling three or four of us down with her. I now sent off a messenger for our leader, who soon arrived, bringing the whole herd with him; but numbers could not help us out of the difficulty.

At length, when we were beginning almost to despair, I chanced to remember a plan, which I had heard was sometimes adopted by the hunters, when they wished to take an elephant alive out of a pitfall. Here, my children, was an instance of the advantage of *remembering what we have heard*; and of remembering it at the right time too, for our knowledge and experience are doubly useful to us when they enable us to decide not only *wisely*, but *quickly*, in affairs of difficulty.

The method, which, at my suggestion, we now adopted, was this;—with our tusks we dug up the earth around the pit, and then shovelled it in with our feet, while our friend below trampled it down hard as fast as it came in. This was very laborious, tedious work for both parties, but we were amply rewarded for our toil; for at length the pit was so far filled up, that, with the assistance of our trunks, the poor captive managed to scramble out of her dungeon. She was dreadfully exhausted with fatigue and hunger, for she told us that she had been in captivity for three days, and she had no doubt that the hunters intended to starve her to death, for they had made no attempts either to release her, or to put an end to her sufferings. I need not tell you that our unfortunate friend received the hearty congratulations of our community, and that she was supplied with abundance of the most nourishing food we could collect, having first been

conducted by two of our females to the river to wash and refresh herself after her sufferings.

So, when she was a little recovered, she informed us that she had strayed away from her herd nearly a moon before, and that she was in search of her companions when she met with her grievous disaster. Then she begged permission to join our community, and the question being put to the vote, was decided unanimously in her favour.

Who was this adopted stranger? My children, she was *your mother!* the faithful friend, who for seventy years has rewarded me, by her affectionate companionship, for my exertions in rescuing her from the cruel grasp of her enemies.

At this part of his story, said Jolly, the old elephant became so prosy and tiresome, talking of his family affairs, and praising his great fat black wife, that I have almost forgotten the rest of his adventures. But I remember that he was chosen leader of the herd soon after his marriage, partly on account of his cleverness in getting the old lady out of the pit, but chiefly because, as he has already told us, his companions believed that he had formerly been a tame elephant. He also reminded his sons, that, though so old and infirm, he had lately broken his tusk by fighting with and killing a very fierce rhinoceros.

So when the old fellow had finished his history, he and his sons moved off slowly towards the thickest part of the forest, and as soon as they were out of sight I slid down from the tree and ran home to our encampment.

We set off next day in pursuit of another herd, which we soon fell in with, and had good luck with our traps, so that we quickly loaded ourselves with ivory. I persuaded my companions not to put any bait on the pit-falls, for sure enough, as the elephant observed, it *does* look very unnatural to see fruit and green branches growing on a beaten path. But whether our success was occasioned by this alteration in our plans, or to the elephants being less cunning than the others, I cannot pretend to tell you; but I say, boys, how angry the old leader would have been, if he had thought, that, by letting out this secret, he had lent a helping hand to "the contemptible little animals," as he had the impertinence to call us!

But I have talked myself hoarse, and it is high time to turn in. So good night, youngsters, all!

Now *all* my tales are finished, and I am going to add what an Irishman might call a *Preface*, at the *end* of the book. I have a reason for this. If my preface had been placed at the beginning, perhaps you would never have read it at all, but would have skipped over it, in hopes of finding something more entertaining. For I was a *stranger* to you when you first took this little book into your hand, but now you have finished it, I hope you will consider the author as a *friend*, who will be very much grieved if you refuse to listen to his parting words. And a very few words they shall be.

Do you think this book has been written for your *amusement* only? That was my principal object, certainly; but I also intended slyly to convey a little *instruction* also. Therefore, in the descriptions of the forms and habits of animals, some of which, though not uncommon in this country, were perhaps almost unknown to you before, the greatest care has been taken **to insert no** information which had not been proved to be correct, either from consulting the best authors on the subject, ¹² or from my own observation. This may be called a *true story*, then, except in one respect, that the characters have been endowed with the gifts of speech and reason. How could I write a tale about animals that could neither speak to each other, nor understand what was spoken to them? And how can we be sure that "dumb creatures," as they are often called, are not improperly named so, and that they do not possess a sort of language of their own? That they have the power of expressing some of their sentiments to each other is certain.

In studying the natural history of animals, we might at first suppose, that some were less fitted for enjoyment than others, and we might say that the mole, for instance, has had a hard lot assigned him, because he is nearly deprived of sight, and is condemned to labour all his days in searching for his food under the earth. But a more perfect knowledge of the form and structure of this and other animals will convince us, that they are *all* so beautifully fitted for the situations for which they were designed, that each may be said to pass its life in the enjoyment of almost perfect happiness and abundance. For the Great Spirit who called them into existence loves *all* his creatures, even the meanest and smallest.

Do you believe this? You cannot doubt it, if you have made even a small progress in the study of Natural history. The Creator's love for every breathing thing, and provident care for its happiness, must be evident to all those who pay attention to the works of his hands. What a great crime, then, shall we be guilty of, if we inflict unnecessary suffering on any of those creatures he has placed in our power! Creatures beloved and cared for by God, but so frequently despised and ill-used by us! Let us think of this, when we are treating any animal unkindly, and beware lest we "be found even to *fight against God*," by thwarting his benevolent designs for the happiness of every creature he has sent forth upon the earth.

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