

THE  
LITTLE  
WATER-FOLKS  
CLARENCE HAWKES





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HE WOULD PICK UP A SUCKER AS EASILY AS HE WOULD A STICK.

# *The Little Water-folks*

*Stories  
of Lake and  
River*

*By Clarence Hawkes*

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The Little Foresters,  
and Stories of the  
Good Green Wood*

*Illustrated by*

*Charles Copeland*



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DEDICATED TO THE BOY WHO SEES.



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# THE LITTLE WATER-FOLKS

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It was a red-letter day in the many wonderful days of childhood, when I ran away from home, across an orchard and half-way through a meadow, to the wild foreign banks of Willow Brook.

It was not quite out of sight of the house, this mysterious foreign land into which I had come, but home looked so far away and I was such a very small boy, that I was almost a mind to cry, or run home quick, before some one came along and stole me, as I had heard they did poor Charlie Ross.

But I finally overcame this terror of being so far from home, and drabbled my little red kilt skirts in the shallows of Willow Brook until I looked as though I had fallen in.

It was the setting sun and lengthening shadows that finally lent wings to my small

legs, and filled my heart with terror, so that I fled home like a frightened deer.

If Willow Brook with its bright shallows and its deep pool full of minnows and pollywogs was my first childish water-love, the old mill-pond was my second.

When I was told that I could go to school for the first time the following week, I replied, "My, won't that be great! I can go by the old mill-pond and see the wheels go round every day."

My third water-love was a sparkling woodland lake that we passed on the road to town, which trip I occasionally took with my father.

When we came to the top of the long hill, by standing up on the seat I could just get a glimpse of the bright waters shimmering through the distant tree-tops.

How my little heart would thump when I saw the first sparkling shimmer of this woodland lake! "There it is, Papa, I see it," I would shout in my shrill treble.

It was not only for themselves that I loved

Willow Brook, the old mill-pond, and the woodland lake, but for my little water-people, who lived in and about them. How lacking a brook would be without minnows or any sign of fish life ! How uninteresting a mill-pond, without pickerel or perch, or if there were no muskrat houses upon the banks !

So you see the streams and the lakes are interesting for the life they hold, as well as for their own sweet beauty.

Pinheads, minnows and pollywogs, caught in a palm-leaf hat, are every country boy's first achievement, as a fisherman. After that comes the bent pin and twine string period ; but if he is a wide-awake boy, these things will not satisfy for long, and by the time he is six or seven years old, he will be fishing, with a real hook and line, bought at the country store with pennies saved during many weeks for the purpose.

But, when that real fishline with a real hook at the end is at last fastened to a peeled ironwood pole, your little fisherman is the happiest boy in the world.

What would I not give now to follow that barefooted urchin down the course of Willow Brook, stepping from stone to stone, nicely balancing that peeled ironwood fish-pole.

If the joy of it would only come back I could carry my fish on a willow stringer and leave my jointed rod, reel and fish-basket at home, and even be content to catch red fins and shiners.

But Willow Brook did not belong entirely to me, although I thought it did. A noisy quarrelsome king-fisher called it his particular fishing preserve, and he was as angry when I appeared as though he had been the real owner, and had kept the brook posted with the sign, "All small boys are strictly forbidden fishing in this brook. Signed, Mr. Bluebelted King Fisher."

For a long time the marsh where Willow Brook struggled into existence was a fearful place, and one that I hardly dared penetrate, for to my small mind it was haunted by a terrible demon, or some unheard of beast.

When I first heard that wild hollow booming sound, coming as though from the inside of the earth and rolling across the marsh so mysteriously I fled in terror without stopping to investigate. But after a while my boyish curiosity was rewarded by finding out the great boomer who had terrified me.

He was only just an American bittern when one had discovered the fact, and no more to be feared than a night-hawk, although he sounded like the evil one.

Down by the little bridge where Willow Brook crossed a lonely old roadway, that I sometimes took to school, lived my ducklings in a tree, as I called them. Their habits were so different from those of other ducks, that I would have been interested in them had even they not been my particular property.

The great American blue heron who fished in the old mill-pond and builded his nest in the top of a tall pine was more of a study even than the wood ducks, for he was hard to spy upon. His eyesight was of the keenest and his hearing was just as good. His

eye would nearly always search me out when I thought I was unobserved, and then he would go sailing away, and there would be no more frog-catching that day.

If I were to tell you here of the two sleek otters who had their slide on the north bank of the pond, where I could see them at their play from an upper window in the old mill, I might spoil the story of "A Twenty-Dollar Coat," so you will have to read that for yourself.

Out on the cranberry bog was a half dozen comical houses, looking for all the world like haycocks. But when one got near to them they were seen to be much larger than the ordinary haycock.

This was the home of a large muskrat colony, and they could be seen to good advantage when the high water flooded their houses in the spring, and they had to take refuge on small islands out of reach of the flood.

The playful mink too frequented the banks of Willow Brook, but I did not like him, al-

though he and his family are as playful as kittens. The mink is a cruel, bloodthirsty fellow, and he catches a great many fish, and of course I wanted to catch the fish myself.

But these boyhood days are past for me, and it is for you, boys, who read this book, to make the most of yours. Be joyous like the little brook that turns your toy mill-wheel. Be pure, like the little stream that laves your bare feet. Be industrious like the stream that feeds the mill-pond and turns the miller's wheel, and be happy while you are yet a boy.



## CHAPTER I

### A TWENTY-DOLLAR COAT

WHEN I was a barelegged, freckled-faced boy, going to school at the little brick school-house down in the Hollow (pronounced Holler, by the country people), there were many things in earth and air that interested me. Many a hard nut, aside from those that rattled down from walnut or butternut trees, nature gave me to crack. Some of them came open after I had pounded my fingers many times, but others are mysteries to this day ; secrets that the human mind cannot see into or understand.

The mere walking to and from school at morning and evening was like a pleasant book, whose pages I never tired of turning, for there was always some new story told by

the changing seasons; or, it was an old story that I had heard before, but in such a gay new dress that I did not recognize it.

Close by the schoolhouse ran a little brook. It was so near that one could almost have thrown a hook into the water from one of the back windows. This stream was the daily companion of the boys and girls, and was really an essential part of the school life. I can hear it now as I write, gurgling and laughing, inviting one to forget Colburn's arithmetic, or how many bones there are in the human body, and just dream of fern-fringed, moss-covered banks, and deep pools where the trout loves to lie.

A few rods above the schoolhouse was the old mill, now fallen into disuse, and covered with clematis and festooned with cobwebs and dust.

But the quaint log dam, built like a child's cob house, still held water enough to make a very respectable pond, large enough for skating and boating. The pond nestled just under a pine woods, and above the dark plumes

of the firs was the ragged blue sky line. It was a restful, dreamy spot, where one could build air-castles and plan what to do when a man. The water was clear and the ice usually transparent, so that I have frequently seen two pine forests and two sky lines, one above, and the other under the ice in the clear water.

There were other creatures, aside from the occupants of the brick schoolhouse, who were interested in the pond. This was made evident by many small tracks in the mud along the bank, and by two large muskrat houses at the upper end. But the pond was chiefly celebrated for a pair of otters that had made it their home for several seasons.

The old mill greatly aided us boys in watching them, as we could enter on the opposite side from the pond, and observe these wary animals through the windows that overlooked the water.

The otters' favorite shore was next to the pine woods, where we afterward discovered that they had a burrow under the roots of

an old tree. They were long, sleek animals, very graceful in the water, but more awkward on land. They were as playful and frolicsome as kittens, and had many romps upon the slippery, sloping banks. Their principal amusement was coasting or sliding, and they seemed to have as much fun in it as any boy possessing the best of sleds. In the summer they slid down the slippery bank into the water. This coast was rather short, but in the winter, they would run down the bank and slide on the ice nearly across the pond. They slid upon their breasts with the fore legs doubled up under them at either side, and the hind legs trailing. As the legs of the otter are set well up on his sides, they are not in the way when he is sliding.

One winter afternoon when we boys were skating on the pond, we discovered a large trout a foot or two below the ice, and all gathered round to admire it; for what boy will not leave any kind of sport to feast his eyes on a trout. We were standing about, discussing whether trout slept in the winter

or not, and how they sustained life, when a black streak shot under us. Where it came from or where it went we never knew. It moved so quickly that we could not tell what it was, but the great trout was gone.

One June morning Billy Bowlegs, a simple farm boy in the neighborhood, shouldered an old shotgun, loaded with large shot, and started after crows which were making sad work in his father's corn.

This was perfectly right and proper, but as ill fortune would have it, Billy blundered upon the otters at play on the bank of the pond, and without a serious thought of what he was doing, raised the gun and fired. He probably would not have gone out of his way to have shot at the otters, for he knew their fur was not good at this time of the year, but there they were, and he had the gun in his hand, and before he realized it the mischief was done. It was nevertheless a wicked act, and one that should always be punished.

When the smoke from the old shotgun cleared away, both otters were seen to be hit.

One was kicking in his last agony, and the other was quite dead. They had been in line and only a few rods away, and the large shot had done the rest.

Rather shamefacedly Billy carried home the dead otters. At first he thought he would be a hero, but instead, every one called him a fool, and the sheriff threatened him with arrest.

A day or two later it occurred to some one that there might be a litter of young otters somewhere in the bank, and half a dozen boys and men went to look for the burrow. At last they found it under the roots of an old pine, but it was necessary to dig it open from the top to see what it contained. Two little winking, blinking, otter pups were found, one of them too weak to do more than gasp, but the other had strength enough left to whine feebly.

Ned Hawley claimed them, as he had first thought of looking for them, so he put them in his coat pockets and made all haste home.

Milk, fed from a spoon, soon revived the small otter who had cried, but the other one was too far gone, and the next morning was dead. But the remaining otter pup thrived upon clear milk, and later on bread and milk, and took to his new home and friends almost as though he had been a dog. His sturdiness and self-reliance, and the way that he had of getting out of all difficulties, with his fur whole, soon gained him the name of Trojan, and it is with Trojan that this story has to do.

By midsummer Trojan was as large as a small cat, and as frolicsome as a kitten. His first aversion was for dogs, and when he was but four or five months old, he drove a puppy, twice his size, from the back room where he lived.

His first love was fish, and he would even go to the cat's dish for that dainty, although he well knew the uncertainty of pussy's temper, and the very sharp arguments for her own rights, that she concealed in her velvet paws. Trojan knew all these things ; he had learned

them by hard bites and scratches, but the smell of that fish was too much for him. Besides, why did they always give the fish heads to the cat, when he was so fond of them ?

It was most interesting to watch Trojan's growth and his development of likes and dislikes.

The old cat, whose milk dish he coveted, was tolerated, but dogs he abhorred from his puppyhood. If they were too large for him to attack, he would slink under some bench or friendly shelter, and stand there eyeing the intruder with beady eyes, not forgetting to show his teeth and growl. His own characteristics were more those of the canine family whom he so hated, than those of the cat whom he rather liked. If, on the other hand, the dog was somewhere near his size, he at once gave battle, and he was so much more agile than his enemy, that he usually got the better of his canine foe and drove him away discomfited.

He early learned that water was his natural

element, and always when too hard pressed would take refuge in a ditch in the meadows at the back of the house. The water was never very deep in the ditch, but it was overgrown with lush grass, and made splendid cover.

By the first autumn Trojan had attained about one third his full growth, and his coat was sleek and glossy.

The first winter he accidentally learned the art of sliding, and after that he would play at it for an hour at a time with as much zest as a child. He was lying upon the banking at the back of the house. There was a glare crust and he slipped from his place, and went sliding, tail first, down into the meadow. This so pleased him that he tried it again. He soon discovered that it was pleasanter to go head first, then he could see where he was going. After he had taken the slide he was all eagerness to return to the starting place, and would scramble back at his greatest speed.

He also learned to give himself a good

strong shove with his hind legs when he started. This made the slide longer and swifter. He held his forelegs doubled back up under him, and his head just high enough to clear the glare crust. This was a sport he never tired of, even when he was five or six years old.

No one ever knew just how he learned to fish. But the instinct was so strong within him, that he took to it, as a duck does to water.

Sometimes the boys would come across him on the banks of a stream, when they would throw to him all the dace and red fins upon their stringers. Perhaps he was given the first brook fish, and saw that it was good, or maybe he went into the water and made the discovery all by himself. But this is certain, Trojan was a great fisherman.

He never splashed or floundered about in the water like a dog, but his every movement was as silent and gliding as though the water had been air. He slipped into the stream smoothly and silently, and when he appeared

on shore, there was very little ripple or splash.

He would pick up a sucker in a straight-away swim as easily as he would a stick. River dace and perch were also easy for him to take. Quite frequently too, he surprised a large trout, that would be sunning standing with his head up stream gently fanning the water with his fins.

I do not know how he managed it, for the trout can move through the water so fast that the eye can scarcely follow him, but it was probably by stealth. Maybe he was lying in the shallow water with his nose just showing above the surface, looking for all the world like an old log, when the trick was done.

He always brought his catch on shore and held it between his paws, as a dog would a bone, while he ate it.

The second autumn, the long hairs that sprinkle the pelt of the otter, giving it a ragged appearance before it is plucked, appeared. But the fur was wonderfully soft

and luxuriant. A coat that any four-footed creature might well be proud of.

But Trojan was probably all unconscious of how his warm coat was coveted by man. All he knew was that it fitted him well, and was warm and altogether suited to his needs.

When he was fully grown he was a beautiful specimen of our most valuable, fur-bearing animal, measuring nearly four feet from tip to tip. Of this two and a half feet was head and body, and sixteen inches tail.

The tail was not so bushy as that of a fox, yet it was well furred, and quite ornamental. His body was round and lithe. His head was rather small and a little flattened. His ears were small and nestled so closely in his fur, that you had to look twice to see them. The entrance was guarded by a fur-covered water pad, with which he could close his ear at will, and keep it entirely dry inside. His visage was quite whiskery, especially when he was angry.

Trojan's most memorable battle with dogs was that in which he stood off two, each

larger than himself, with scarcely a scratch upon his sleek coat, while both dogs were badly chewed.

The otter's cage or den stood in a corner between the main house and the ell. It was a cute little house, three or four feet high with iron bars, and a swing door at the front. At first Trojan had been confined in this house, but finally he was left to go and come as he pleased.

Once dogs came upon him when he was eating a fish head, and though he was not prepared for them, he backed up into a corner near his house, and did battle like his namesakes.

At first he merely contented himself with keeping them at bay, but by degrees his love of battle got the better of him and he went in for blood.

His snake-like head and long neck shot out like a flash, and he nipped a piece out of one of his assailant's ears. Finally they closed upon him, thinking to take his citadel by storm, but he bounded lightly over

their backs, leaving his mark as he went, and took refuge in another corner. Then he caught one of his antagonists by the gristle of the nose, and the poor canine's yelps of pain soon brought men to the scene, and the battle was stopped. After this the dogs gave the otter a wide berth.

The fourth year of his domesticated life, Trojan made himself a burrow on the bank of a famous trout stream that ran through the meadow, a quarter of a mile from the house. This burrow was located under the roots of a water elm, and had two entrances, one above the water and one beneath.

This was a safeguard against having his retreat cut off. If an enemy appeared above the ground he could disappear beneath the water. If the enemy came from the water door, he would flee through the other. But there was no quadruped that swam in New England waters that Trojan feared.

As he grew older the tendency to return to his wild haunts grew upon him, and he made frequent long trips along the water

courses in the neighborhood. We boys would occasionally come across him two or three miles from home. He was not companionable at such times, but always slunk away as though he did not want us to see him. But he never quite forgot his little house with the swing door, and the fish head that was usually awaiting him at the hand of his good friends.

There are many stories still told at the brick house of this strangely domesticated wild creature, who in his tamed state is so nearly like a dog. But the most celebrated of all his capers cost me a split bamboo trout rod, and my reputation as the crack boy fisherman of the neighborhood.

An argument arose one day as to which of us boys was the better angler, and it was finally decided to test it by a day's fishing. Each boy was to go when and where he pleased on a certain day, and we would meet at night and compare our catches.

The morning of our fishing contest, I was astir bright and early, and by half-past five

was hurrying through the meadows, dragging a home-made hickory fish-pole after me in the grass. It was an ideal day for trout, just a little overcast, and not too warm.

The speckled beauties bit that morning as though I had been the only eager fisherman in the world, and that the only day in which they could bite. By noon I had about forty as pretty trout as ever made a boy's eyes dance.

The stringer upon which I was carrying my fish was rather large, and occasionally a fish tore out at the gills and fell off. To remedy this difficulty I concluded to leave this string in some place, and get it on my return down stream. It was a careless thing to do, but I was at the careless age, so I pulled a handful of brakes and wrapped the trout in them, and thrust them in a hollow log, marking the spot carefully by a little waterfall. There would be no mistaking it when I returned.

I was gone about three hours, stopping for lunch, and took ten or fifteen more trout,

and felt sure that the split bamboo was mine, for my catch now numbered over fifty fish.

When I returned to the old log for the first string, my suspicion was at once aroused, for the brakes in which I had wrapped the trout were scattered about, and there was a fish head on the ground near by. I thrust my arm further and further into the cavity, but could find no fish.

Then I began examining the dirt about the log, and made out the clean-cut footprints of an otter. Trojan, was the word that came instinctively to my lips. Trojan, Trojan, how could you have done such a thing? And as I looked at my remaining string visions of the new rod that had been so bright a few moments before, grew dim.

I found the willow switch on which the fish had been strung, a few rods further down the stream, and there were several fish heads scattered about. Half a mile further down I came upon the otter lying on a rock in the middle of the stream.

When he saw me he slipped into the water, and went swiftly away. When I returned home, he was lying in the further end of his cage, saying plainly by his actions, "I did not steal your fish."

My last meeting with Trojan was so pathetic, that I forgave him the theft of my trout and remembered him only as one of the most engaging domesticated wild animals that I ever knew.

I was hunting woodcock with a boy friend. The birds had come in the night before, and were very plenty. Our old liver-colored pointer Dan was doing good service, and we were having quite a day of it.

We were going through some heavy cover near a brook, when I noticed a queer movement in a clump of willows, and went nearer to investigate.

I could hardly believe my eyes when I beheld Trojan, the pet of the neighborhood, tugging and straining in a trap. This in itself would not have been so bad, but he was in a sorry plight.

He had torn out several of his front teeth on the trap, and had broken his leg so badly that the jagged end of the bone showed through the ragged and torn flesh. His eyes were large with pain, and his whole aspect was most pitiful. He had seen me and had made frantic efforts to attract my attention, probably thinking that I could at once put him right.

But no human skill could have mended that jagged paw, and I knew that Trojan's case was hopeless.

I was just considering what was the best way of putting him out of his misery and wishing there was some one else to do it, when the alder bushes parted, and old Tom Knowland looked in upon me. Tom was a famous trapper, and the trap on Trojan's fore paw was his.

"Hello," he said, not seeing the otter. "Seen anything of one of my traps walking off with a good heavy clog. Must be something big in it."

"You old fool," I replied, forgetting my

manners in my sorrow. "You have caught Trojan."

"Trojan, Trojan," repeated Tom, in astonishment. "By Ginger, that's too bad. Too darn bad. I'll let him go."

"It won't do any good," I replied, "he's too done up, you'd better kill him."

Then I hurried away, not wishing to look behind. Through milkweed and brambles I pushed, with a reckless ferocity. The sun still shone brightly, but somehow it looked dim and sorrowful. I did not care if there were more woodcock in the cover, for something had already happened in the alder-bushes yonder, that had put the day out of joint for me.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PEOPLE OF FROG-HOLLOW

THERE is one event in the calendar of on-coming spring that the country people always heed ; and that is the first peeping of the hyla, the smallest and bravest of all the frogs, who pipes in the shrillest of voices, "Spring, Spring, Spring."

When the farm boy hears that first shrill peeping from the meadow land, or the swale, it is a signal to him that one portion of the winter's labor is over, and that is the sugar season. All good sugar makers know that after this faithful sign from the little green folks down in the meadows, that it will be useless to keep out the sap pails any longer. So the woodshod sled goes its rounds through the sugar-bush for the last time, and pails are gathered, washed and put away in readiness for next year, and all because the little green

prophets down in the meadow have given the signal.

Frog-Hollow, where these little frog folks lived, was a strip of lowland bordering a lonely country road, that my bare feet traveled daily during the school terms, and less frequently in summer time.

To my childish fancy Frog-Hollow was peopled with hobgoblins and phantoms, as well as frogs. I had never seen any of these apparitions, but I had seen strange will-o'-the-wisps, and that was almost as bad. When a pillar of fire, like that which guided the Israelites, traveled about the meadows, unaided, such soil was no place for a small boy after dark.

In addition to all this, I was not quite sure but that our own Frog-Hollow and the "Sleepyhollow" in Irving's Sketch Book were not one and the same place. It certainly answered the description nicely. So I might meet the headless André, almost any night, riding upon his black charger, in search of his head.

From all these childish imaginings, you will see that Frog-Hollow was a strange and awesome place and a region to be shunned after dark.

Many a night I have stood upon the little bridge just where the bog was deepest, listening to the old familiar frog song from which the place was named.

This was in the gloaming, while the afterglow still lighted the western sky, but when the first bright star pricked through the dusky sky near the horizon, I fled from the awful mysteries that hung over the swamp.

Down in the swamp by the edge of the road,  
When the lamps of night appear,  
When the water is high and the meadows are flowed,  
A wonderful chorus I hear.

O the hylas cry Peep, but the bullfrogs down deep,  
Shout, Holler, Frog-Holler, Frog-Holler.

O all through the night, of the early Spring,  
When the buds are beginning to swell,  
You may hear the frogs and the hylas sing,  
And a wonderful legend they tell,  
For the hylas cry Peep, but the bullfrogs down deep,  
Shout, Holler, Frog-Holler, Frog-Holler.

When the whip-poor-will sings, and the night-hawk  
on wings,  
As silent as footsteps of night,  
Is scouring the skies for small flying things,  
And the firefly is showing his light,  
Then the hylas cry Peep, but the bullfrogs down deep,  
Shout, Holler, Frog-Holler, Frog-Holler.

When the small boy was sent for cowslips he always swung a willow basket across his arm and started for Frog-Hollow.

The sluggish little stream winding in and out among the cat-tails and water grasses, fringed with cranberry vines and mosses and choked with rushes and frog spittle was a famous place for cowslips.

The monotony of picking cowslips was varied by many a pleasant surprise. Sometimes it was an old green bullfrog, sitting beneath a lily pad, still as a statue, contemplating the brook, with his grave frog interest.

At other times he would be sitting on a stone, catching flies, or perhaps he was taking a sun-bath.

He was a dignified, proud old fellow, al-



HE WAS A DIGNIFIED PROUD OLD FELLOW.



ways dressed in the tastiest manner. How well his green coat matches the green of the bank, and its reflection in the water and his yellow vest also was not easily seen.

He never seemed to be much afraid of the boy, but any sudden motion on his part would send Mr. Frog to the bottom of the pool with a loud splash. You could always follow his course by a long muddy streak that he made in the water, and if you followed this to its end, you would see what looked at first like a small moss-covered stone, or the end of a stick, but if you looked more carefully you would make out Mr. Frog, lying on the muddy bottom of the stream in snug hiding.

There was also the grass frog who lived in the grass along the shore, and the beautiful spotted wood frog, who never went to the brook at all, except to spawn.

Both of these were interesting, but the old green bullfrog was the boy's favorite. One summer afternoon the boy was sitting under an old water-elm, down in the pasture by the side of a deep pool. The pasture land was

below Frog-Hollow, and here the stream was larger and clearer, and just by the elm the boy had dammed the stream, and he could occasionally catch bullheads here, if the day was not too clear, although they bit much better at night.

But the bullheads had all gone to sleep to-day, and the boy leaned back against the trunk of the tree and dreamed a pleasant day-dream, while the waters flowed musically over the stones at his feet, and the silver-footed moments of the summer afternoon slipped silently by.

What a fine thing it is to be a boy, the youngster thought, as he leaned comfortably against the tree, and looked across the pasture land to a distant herd of feeding cows. He could just hear the tinkle of old Speckle's bell, and it chimed in so nicely with the gurgle of the stream. A frog was croaking softly to himself in a distant pool, and his voice was sleepy and contented. How easy it was to dream, when all the world was dreaming too!

“Hello; what’s up?” called a frog almost at the boy’s feet. These words had been spoken so plainly, although there was still the husky frog tone, that the boy started.

When he at last made out his questioner in the pads so near that he could have poked him with his foot, the boy saw that the frog was smiling, and chuckling down in his yellow throat.

“What’s up?” repeated the old frog in his deep mellow voice. “I thought you did not look quite natural.”

“There isn’t anything up that I know of,” replied the boy sharply, for he thought the frog was making fun of him, and he did not like to be made fun of.

He was reaching for a stick with which to poke this audacious fellow, when he chanced to look at his foot. His toes had suddenly become long and fibrous. In fact they were webbed, which gave them a queer feeling, as though they had all been tied together with a string. And the sole of his foot was shrunken.

Then he glanced down at his leg. It, too, had shrunk, and instead of being covered with his brown overhauls, was dressed in a tight-fitting pair of green pants. If the boy had been astonished on seeing his green pants, he was amazed at his yellow vest, which he discovered a moment later.

His astonishment was so great that he barely saved himself from pitching into the pool. But the second that he leaned over the bank showed him a strange face in the water. He looked again to make sure.

But there was no mistaking the reflection. It was that of a great green bullfrog, fat and complacent, and well suited with his dress and deportment.

“Come down,” said the frog, whom the boy had first noticed.

“Get wet,” croaked the boy, and to his amazement his voice had a frog-like sound. “Get wet, get wet, what fun! get wet, what sport!” The old frog was making fun of him again, so the boy jumped, cleaving the water with the familiar chug.

He went down to the bottom of the pool as he had so often seen frogs do, and buried himself in the mud, just letting his head stick out, where he was presently joined by the old frog who had made fun of him.

How cool and sweet the water seemed, after the hot upper air of a summer afternoon. Grasses and lily-pads were growing all about them, but they looked misty and rather indistinct, seen through the water.

The sky too, was a hazy blue, and nearly everything looked as though seen through colored glass.

The boy had not got his frog eyes fully developed, but after a few minutes he saw more clearly.

“Pretty slick, pretty slick,” croaked the old frog, who had joined the new arrival at the bottom of the pool.

The boy imagined that the frog referred to his new suit, which really did fit him well. So he croaked back, “Quite good, quite good.”

“Your suit matches grass, matches pads,

so boys don't see," piped the old frog. "Boys kill," he continued.

The boy-frog now remembered several shameful excursions of his own after frogs and pollywogs, and he blushed, but said nothing.

Presently there was a heavy thud, thud, on the bank, and the old frog croaked, "keep dark, keep still."

The boy-frog peeped out from his screen of mud and saw a man with a fish-pole and a net. On the end of the line dangled a gang hook, which was decorated with a bit of bright red yarn. The bright color fascinated the boy-frog and made him uneasy. A strange impulse to jump at the thing which the man was dangling above, seized him. The old frog saw his peril and croaked, "Don't bite, don't bite, hook prick, hook prick."

Then the boy-frog remembered. He had often caught frogs himself for the city people at the hotel. What a fool he had been to be so easily deceived.

So the two frogs at the bottom of the pool kept very quiet while the man dangled his bait above them ; after a while he went further up stream, and the tramp, tramp, on the bank grew fainter and fainter.

When the man had gotten out of sight the old green bullfrog invited the boy-frog to come out on the bank, and the two sat on an old log and caught flies for an hour.

“It is quite easy for frogs and toads to catch flies,” said the old frog, getting confidential as he flicked in fly after fly. “You see nearly all the members of the batrachian family, to which the toads also belong, being first cousins of ours, have their tongues attached to the mouth at the front, and the end back in the throat is free. If a frog had his tongue fastened on the other way and had to run it out whenever he caught a fly he would never get one. Now all he has to do is to flick it out, and as the tongue is covered with a sticky substance Mr. Fly is caught and held.”

“Why is it that you frogs are all born

tadpoles and why do you finally lose your tails," asked the boy-frog.

"Well, I do not know that I can just answer that question," said the old bullfrog, flicking in a fly as he spoke. "I suppose it is more natural for our eggs to hatch in the fish shape. We are so small when we are first hatched that we could not support legs.

"The reason we lose the tail finally is because we have no further use for it, and nature always throws away the things that are useless. When we were small we needed the tail to swim with and to steer by, same as fish do, but now we can do both with our strong legs," and the old frog gave a great leap and a few vigorous strokes by way of illustration. When he reappeared on the log beside the boy-frog he continued :

"I am going on a journey to a place called Frog-Hollow, where there is to be a great frog convention this very night, and if you wish you may go with me. We will meet many members of the frog family, and you may

find out some interesting things about us batrachians.”

“What fun, what fun,” piped the boy-frog, “let’s go, let’s go.”

At the bewitching hour of twilight they swam under the little bridge that crossed the road down in Frog-Hollow and came out into the swamp above.

The boy-frog knew the spot quite well. He had often dangled his legs off the bridge and listened to the frogs in the swale, but to-night the place held new charms for him, and he knew that he should learn something of the mystery that had made the place so fearful to small boys after dark.

The convention was to be held upon a little island midway in the stream.

When the two travelers from the pasture reached the place of meeting, the spring chorus was in full blast, sounding just as the boy-frog had heard it many a time upon the lonely road, only to-night it was much louder than usual.

The island and both banks of the stream

were fairly covered with frogs, all piping, croaking, and bellowing away at the top of their voices.

They ranged all the way in size from the tiny cricket frog, or hyla, who is the smallest of all the frogs, up to some green bayou frogs who had come to the convention from a distant lake. The largest of these monster frogs were six or eight inches in length, and their deep voices sounded like the lowing of cattle, in queer contrast to the shrill piccolo notes of the hyla.

Then there was the wood-frog, dressed in his tan suit, croaking softly to himself. The grass-frog, too, was there, dressed in a suit that matched the grass to a nicety.

The leopard-frog, a queer spotted fellow from the marsh, was also there. He was very vain of his suit that made him so different from his fellows.

The toads were likewise represented, being first cousins to the frogs, and both belonging to the batrachian family. Most conspicuous among these was *Bufo*, the common hop-

toad, who dwells under every boy's front doorstep if he is not disturbed. Bufo was one of the lustiest of the musicians; and although he kept to the bank of the stream, yet he swelled out his throat until he looked as though he had the mumps, and sent forth a high-keyed, rattling note that, heard upon a city street, would have brought the cop around the corner on the run.

It must not be imagined that this wild, weird song was given in darkness, for just above the island the will-o'-the-wisp hung, and the firefly danced in and out, glowing brightly every few seconds.

When the song had echoed across the marsh continuously for half an hour, a mighty bayou frog took a commanding position on the island, and called the convention to order.

“Batrachians, attention,” he bellowed in his deep voice, and the song was at once hushed.

“It is now time for me to call to order the annual spring convention of the frogs

and toads of many lakes, rivers and streams, who annually meet in this swale." At these words there were peeps and croaks of approval.

"It gives me great pleasure to again welcome you to our meeting-place," continued the chairman in his deep voice, "and I am sure that much good will come of this meeting."

"It will enable us to again see friends from distant marshes, to report upon doings in our own particular districts, and to devise ways and means for promoting our general good."

"I wish you would not use such big words," croaked an old frog from the bank, "I ain't eddycated."

A chorus of croaks and gulps expressed the uncontrollable mirth of the convention at this confession from the old grandfather. But the chairman continued disdainfully.

"If grandpa don't understand he had better go back to the tadpole state, and learn his lessons over again. I am afraid that when

he was a tadpole his brains were in his tail, and when he lost that, he lost his wit."

This retort completely silenced the old frog, so that he did not even croak again, during the entire meeting.

"Now that I have welcomed you," continued the chairman, "and expressed my good will for you all, and the hope that this will be our most successful convention, I call for our secretary's report."

At this request Mr. Wood-Frog hopped forward and in a low croaking voice read the following report :

"Fellow batrachians. Since our last meeting, which was held in this identical spot just a year ago to-night, great prosperity has been ours. It will be remembered that last year was a very wet season, and well suited to the wants and needs of frog folks. In every lake, stream, and I might almost say in every mudpuddle, our spawn was laid and hatched, so that we more than made up for our losses sustained in the great drought of two years ago.

It is also a matter upon which to congratulate ourselves that some of our enemies are growing fewer. Hawks, owls, minks, and muskrats are all less plenty than they were within my own memory.

I think that the barbarous custom among men of catching us and serving our hind legs upon their breakfast table is likewise on the decline. My own particular branch of the family have not suffered in that way, but that of our worthy president has suffered grievously at their hands. However, we fare much better here in the United States than in Europe, where our cousins are slaughtered by the thousands. If the curious Frenchmen, who will eat almost anything, could only be persuaded to eat snakes they might confer a lasting benefit upon the whole frog family.

Another thing upon which we may congratulate ourselves is, that children are being taught by their elders and in the public schools, kindness and consideration for all living things.

Men, who were not above stoning frogs in their youth, now discourage their own boys from such practices, and much good will come of it.

The farmers, also, are finding out what a great benefit we are in the garden and in the fields, where we keep down bugs, grubs and insects that would destroy his crops. So he is glad to see us.

If there was some way to get rid of our worst enemy, the blue heron, it would be a great help to the frog world. But I rejoice that the heron too is disappearing from our lakes and streams, where he once did such fearful execution.

But we still have plenty of enemies, and it behooves us to be always on our guard, watchful and wary, for we know not at what moment some of them will appear.

It may be a pike, who can swallow a half-grown frog whole, or it may be a water snake who is coiled up on a stone in the middle of the stream.

On the whole, I think it is safe to say that

the year we have just passed has been most successful, and I congratulate the frogs of Frog-Hollow upon this fact. With this pleasant assurance I will conclude my report."

Amid a chorus of peeping, croaking and bellowing that fairly made the swamp ring, the report was accepted, and the meeting was declared open for general business.

One great green frog moved that all the frog family adopt the regulation suit worn by his branch, namely, the green coat and pants with yellow vest.

Other frogs argued, however, that the suit which each member of the family wore was best suited to his needs.

The wood-frog argued that the green coat and pants would be entirely out of place in the woods upon brown leaves. "My own tan-colored suit blends nicely with autumn leaves," he said, "but the green suit would leave me an easy prey to all my enemies."

So the mover of the green suit motion saw that he had made a mistake and withdrew.

Bufo, the hop-toad, defended his branch of the family from the ridicule of leopard frog, who had charged the toads with being ugly, and too plain dressers, by saying that their plain brown suit was the best calculated to screen them from their enemies. He said that he could lie in a dirt pile all day long and not be discovered.

“What value is a gaudy suit,” he asked, “after you have had the life hammered out of you, or been swallowed by a snake?” He further said that the “frogs need not give themselves any airs, as the toads were much more useful, and more highly esteemed by man.” He concluded his speech by saying that leopard frog’s brains were all in his heels, so the toads did not mind his croaking. When the discussion of matters pertaining to the numerous family of batrachians, of which the chairman informed the convention that there were nine branches, containing no less than four hundred and forty species, had been concluded, the meeting was adjourned for another year, and games and

sports were indulged in until the cool hours of early morning.

Leopard frog, the champion jumper from the marsh, gave an exhibition of his skill. With two or three jumps in which to get under headway, he cleared the stream where it was four feet across, and he jumped it easily where it was a yard across at a standing jump.

Hyla, the cricket frog, the smallest of all the frogs, gave an exhibition of skinning one's self, and then eating the skin. A feat that most of us would not care to perform.

He first started the membranous skin at the corners of his mouth and then with his forefeet pulled the skin covering his head into his mouth. With his strong forked tongue he then forced this portion of his skin down his throat. Then by the most vigorous kicking he kicked himself out of the rest of his suit, and deliberately swallowed the entire covering of his nimble body. The whole performance taking only a few minutes.

Another amusement that made much mirth was a duet between hyla and one of the great bayou frogs. The hyla peeped away at the top of his voice and the mighty bass bullfrog sounded his deepest notes. The test was to see which could drown out the other. But when the duet had lasted for half an hour and hyla was still peeping lustily, and the deep bass was booming away with might and main, it was declared a draw. The meeting was brought to a close by a fine game of water-tag and hide-and-seek, varied with much rough-and-tumble sport.

When the stars began to fade and a pale streak was appearing in the east and soft white mist began creeping up from the swale, all went their several ways.

The boy-frog and his friend went back to the pasture, and the boy-frog hopped out on the bank under the tree where the stranger had found him.

“How ugly you are becoming,” said the bullfrog as he bade the boy-frog good-bye.

“I really believe you are turning back into a boy again.”

The boy-frog looked down at his feet and saw that they were no longer webbed, but were the bruised and scratched feet of a bare-footed boy.

He also no longer wore the gray green pants which he had become quite proud of, but instead his old brown overalls.

“I believe I am half afraid of you,” said the frog, “guess I had better be going.”

Then the old cruel impulse came to the boy and he reached for a stick.

With a splash the frog clove the water and dove to the bottom ! and remembering what he had just heard, the boy threw away his stick and looked off across the fields at the setting sun.

How late it was getting. What a long day-dream he had had while the swift summer hours slipped by ! He would drive home the cows and that would excuse him for staying so long in the pasture.

## CHAPTER III

### BLUEBACK, THE FROG-CATCHER

PROBABLY the most interesting of all the shy water-folks who frequented the old mill-pond, about which so many pleasant boyhood memories cluster, was Blueback, the frog-catcher.

He was the most wary and cunning of them all, and this very fact made him more interesting. It is not the discoveries that come so easy in the woods or waters that are worth trying for, but those that take patience and the ability to watch days, weeks, or even a whole season, for the desired glimpse of nature that we are seeking.

What country-born boy is there who has not a picture of some old mill-pond that stands out distinctly among the brightest and best pictures of boyhood. Why should he not remember it? Did not the old pond fur-

nish him swimming and boating, fishing and skating, and was not its bright glimmering surface a picture that always pleased and rested his eyes? How many a time I have stood up in the old buggy as we drove to town that I might get the first bright glimpse of the old mill-pond, just seen through a vista of pine woods.

This same pine woods did more to help me in my observations of the frog-catcher than any other thing.

One side of the pond was skirted by a broad pasture, which afforded no cover, from which to observe the heron. I never could stalk him from this side of the pond and get near enough to see what he was doing; but on the other side it was different, there was the pine woods which crowded close up to the water, where all the blue-green plumes were mirrored in its depths.

By making a long detour and coming down to the pond through the pine woods, I could usually get a good chance to watch the queer old bird on stilts.

Even then he sometimes got the start of me, and the first intimation that I would have that I had been discovered, I would see him slanting gracefully up into the air, flying easily and swiftly, with his long legs dangling below. His hearing and eyesight were truly remarkable, for the pine woods were carpeted with needles, and the bare feet of a boy made almost no sound, especially when he went with tense muscles, stepping on the ball of his foot like an Indian, as he crept from tree to tree like a shadow.

The heron always frequented the other side, where he could see and no one could creep on him unawares. Even at the narrowest point the pond was twenty rods across, so it will be seen that the heron's powers of perception were of the keenest.

I was greatly aided in observing this shy bird by an old field-glass, which a local hero, a captain in the Civil War, had loaned me. This glass seemed to bring old Blueback up to within thirty or forty feet of me, where

all his antics and his manner of hunting and fishing were plainly seen.

It is not common for the heron family to live a pair in a place, as these two birds who frequented our neighborhood did, for they are gregarious, living in quite large communities which are called heronries.

These heronries are usually located in some dense swamp close to a large body of water or a chain of lakes. The nests are usually in the top of tall trees, like the cypress or cedar, and frequently there will be several nests in a tree. Nearly all the crane family, to which the herons belong, seem to be social birds, enjoying their bird village or colony keenly.

It is probable that my solitary pair of blue heron discovered the old mill-pond as they flew over on their spring migration northward, and, liking it, stayed permanently with us. This is the only way I can account for the stragglers that are occasionally found upon our New England lakes and rivers.

Blueback, as I have intimated, was a frog-

catcher, and also a fisherman of no mean order. If patience were the prime requisite to catch fish, and it is certainly one of the virtues of a fisherman, Blueback should have been the greatest fisherman in the world. But of course his manner of fishing was primitive. He had no rod, hook or line, so he used his long sharp beak and his long legs for all they were worth. He would wade out into the water to where it was about a foot and a half deep and there he would stand until a fish came his way. It might be ten minutes, and it might be half an hour; still he would stand like a statue. Not a muscle moving, and with no thought of trying another position until he had thoroughly tested the one he had. (This is a practice that every boy can imitate with profit.) His long neck would be drawn back so that his head rested between his shoulders. His bright eyes were always fixed upon the water, but as far as one could see he might have been asleep, so still he stood.

At last his patience would be rewarded, and

such patience as that always is. His head would shoot out like a flash and go a foot or perhaps a foot and a half under water and a second later he would bring up a chub or a perch, flopping and wriggling; but the unfortunate fish's troubles were soon over, for the frog-catcher always killed his catch as soon as it was taken. If it was a fish he speared it with his long sharp beak; but if it was a frog he pounded it upon a rock until life had left it.

I believe that this grave old heron was even more fond of frog-catching than he was of fishing, for I saw him at it more frequently.

He would stalk his frogs among the lily pads along shore where the water was shallow. He would go with the greatest of caution, lifting his feet slowly, and setting them down carefully, without any sound or splash. When he espied Mr. Bullfrog sitting under a lily pad enjoying himself, he would become even more cautious. Foot by foot he would creep forward, and when the right position

was reached his head would shoot out, as in the case of the fish, and the frog always came up kicking frantically. I do not think I ever saw the frog-catcher miss this game as he occasionally did a fish.

There was a large flat stone on the pasture side of the pond and the frog-catcher usually hid his catches under the edge of this until he had gotten the desired number, when he would gather them together in his bill in a miraculous manner and fly away with them to the nest, back in the pine woods. I could not imagine how he could hold so many frogs at a time, but an old hunter told me that he laid them upon the ground, letting their legs lie crosswise, and then by biting down upon the legs where they crossed, his bill would act like a pair of tweezers. If this was the way it was done, it certainly was very clever.

Two remarkable catches I saw the heron make, that I think must have astonished even so experienced a fishermen as he.

One summer afternoon he had been stand-

ing at the edge of a little clump of alders that grew almost in the water. He had assumed his accustomed attitude, standing erect with his head drawn back between his shoulders and his long index-bill pointing down towards the water.

I remember that there were two things that impressed me as I watched him. How could he stand so still for so long a time? A boy would have wanted to fidget, but Blueback stood like a statue. The second thing was that nature had given him a coat especially designed for fishing. For his blue back so well matched the water that one could hardly discern him.

At last the head of the old fisherman shot out and down like lightning, but did not immediately come up as it usually did. The water was covered with ripples and the frog-catcher seemed to be straining and tugging away with might and main. Presently he put all his strength into one mighty effort, and a monster eel came to the surface, bringing with him a bunch of grass, lily

pads, and other pond growth, as large as a half bushel.

The great eel dropped the bunch of grass, as soon as he discovered that his hold upon the bottom of the pond had been broken, and gave his entire attention to battle. He thrashed the water and tried all the time to coil about the neck of the heron.

Blueback seemed to appreciate fully that if the eel once wound about his neck that he would have serious difficulty in breathing, if he did not have to give it up altogether. So he buffeted his adversary with his great wings. Each time they fell there was a blue flash and a sound like beating a carpet.

Again and again he struck the eel, until at last it hung limp and apparently lifeless, although he was probably only stunned.

Finally the fierce old fisherman went ashore with his catch and laid it upon the ground, where he speared it several times with his bill. Then, concluding that he had got fish enough for that day, he flew away with it to the nest, the eel dangling as low

down as the heron's long legs. The picture reminded me of another lively scene, when a red-tailed hawk, or buzzard, stooped to earth and picked up a five-foot black snake and flew away with it into the blue heavens.

The old heron's second catch that astonished me, and perhaps him as well, was made one afternoon when he had been stalking frogs in the lily pads near shore.

He had been stepping along gingerly, stopping here and there to investigate some bunch of pads or clump of pickerel weed, when he suddenly stopped and stood very still and seemed to be watching something intently. He would reach his head forward and look with the greatest curiosity at something in the water. He seemed to be of two minds, but finally he took the initiative and shot his head under water, and then began hauling with might and main at something that was clearly beyond his strength. There were many bubbles upon the water, and a slight ripple, but the fish did not come to the surface. Again and again he sought to

raise it, curving his long neck and straining away desperately. Finally a great black something, about the size and shape of a half bushel appeared on the surface of the water. It was an enormous turtle. How Mr. Turtle clawed the water, and how the old fisherman gripped his tail and tugged. This queer tug of war was so ludicrous that I laughed, and the spell was broken. The old fisherman let go his hold of the turtle's tail, and Mr. Turtle, nothing loath, sank to the bottom like a stone, while the frog-catcher soared away, over the pine woods where I was hiding, to his distant nest.

Just what the outcome of this strange catch would have been had I not frightened the fisherman, it is hard to say. Certainly the heron could not have carried the turtle away, neither could he have killed him.

He would doubtless have given up and let the poor turtle go, a wiser and sadder turtle, if not a tailless one.

Once, and only once, we boys scaled the old pine, to see the nest, and that experi-

ment quite satisfied the one who undertook it.

Ned Hubbard and I were sitting under the pine, disputing about the number of young that the heron's nest probably contained. He thought five or perhaps six, but I thought three or four would be the limit. There was no way in which to settle the dispute satisfactorily without seeing the inside of the nest, so Ned agreed to go up.

It was a monster first growth pine, three feet in diameter and running up to a great height.

For the first thirty feet there were no limbs, but after that the top was quite bushy. The nest was up about sixty feet, in a dense whirl of limbs.

Ned was obliged to adopt the Hottentot's manner of climbing large trees. This was to pass a piece of rope of sufficient length about the trunk of the tree, and hold each end in the hand. The rope circled the bowl of the tree on the side opposite the climber, and the boy's arms completed the circle. In

order not to lose his hold on the rope, and fall, Ned made a slip-noose in either end, and passed his hand through the loop. In climbing, the boy scrambled up by means of his arms, legs, and the rope, with which he could grip the opposite side of the tree. When he had wriggled up as far as he could without moving the rope, he would suddenly loosen his grip upon the tree with the rope, and throw up both arms. This would throw the rope up a foot or two higher on the tree, where it was tightened by a skillful pull. The novice could not climb a tree in this manner, but the boy who has learned how can go up a large limbless tree like a cat.

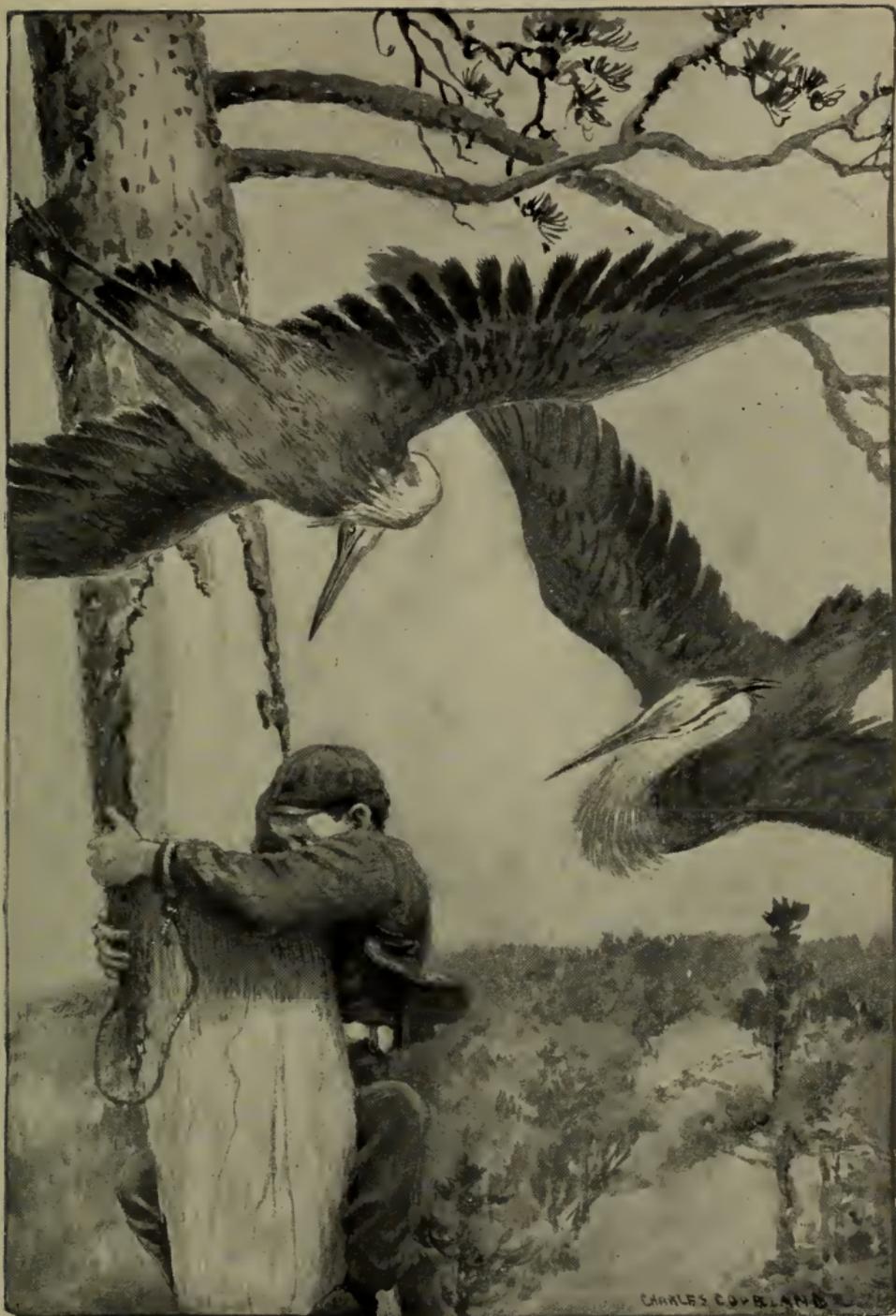
We did not think either of the old herons were at home, but soon discovered that the female was. We could tell her by her greater size. She soon summoned her mate, by rising high in air and circling about. I do not know whether this was a signal agreed upon by them, or whether her flight was agitated and easily understood by the

old fisherman down at the mill-pond, but it soon brought him.

As both birds were sailing about the tree in a menacing manner, I called to Ned to desist, but he would see that nest, if it was a possible thing. He was not any more afraid of the herons than he would have been of a pair of crows. This was his boast, when he went up the tree, but he had quite changed his opinion when he came down.

Up thirty or forty feet from the ground there was a long scar on the old tree, where the lightning had struck it, and here the limbs were not so thick. All went well with Ned until he reached this open place, where he was exposed to attack.

Suddenly, without warning, the female bird swooped at him, coming down with great velocity. Ned had just presence of mind enough left to turn his face to the tree-trunk to protect his eyes and hold on for dear life. The first stroke of the infuriated heron's beak plowed a furrow in Ned's scalp two inches long, cutting clear to the bone. A



NED HAD JUST PRESENCE OF MIND ENOUGH LEFT TO TURN HIS FACE TO THE TREE-TRUNK.



second later the other heron swooped and speared Ned in the side of the face, both strokes being intended for the eyes, but not reaching their mark.

Ned gave a howl of pain and came down through the open spot, hand over hand, in the most reckless manner, not seeing much choice between falling forty feet or having his face picked to pieces by the angry heron.

In fewer seconds than it takes to tell, he was safe among the closely entwining limbs, where the birds could not get at him. In fact they did not try to, after they saw him descending the tree, but contented themselves with hoarse angry croaks and agitated flights about the tree. There is no doubt that had either of us attempted to scale the tree again that we would have had our eyes picked out long before we reached the nest.

I washed the blood from the two ugly gashes at a little spring near by, and then closed the cuts with balsam, which is a most soothing lotion.

Then we wended our way homeward,

wiser and sadder boys, but we had gained no knowledge on the question in dispute, namely, the number of young in the heron's nest. But an old woodsman settled it for us later on, by saying that the heron laid from three to five eggs, usually four, and that the young stayed in the nest until they were nearly grown, the old birds feeding them with frogs, fish, crustaceans, and sometimes even mice, when the fishing was not good.

My last meeting with the grave old fisherman, who always reminded me of a boy on stilts, or a daddy-long-legs, was so startling and unexpected, that thoughts of it made my blood tingle for many a day.

It was early in September of as sweet an autumn day as ever made a boy's heart glad. The late blackberries were fairly weighting the bushes down along the edge of the woods. The fruit was dead ripe, and fell to the ground at a slight touch.

I was tramping the glorious sweet-smelling autumn woods in company with an old hunter helping him hunt partridge. But

my part was a rather secondary one, although I thought it most important. I carried the game bag and went upon the opposite side of the cover that we were working, so when the dog pointed, I could flush the birds and cause them to fly out on my companion's side. This is a practice that I should not advise any boy to try, even for the most experienced and careful hunters, for it finally cost me my eyesight.

Most of the beavies of young partridge had not yet separated, and we found them very plenty.

It was not until towards evening when we were wending our way homeward with a heavy game-bag that my surprise came. We were coming down through the pine woods back of the old mill-pond and had nearly reached the water, when my companion suddenly threw up his gun and without seeming to take aim, fired. I could not imagine what he had shot at, as the trees were quite thick overhead. While I was still wondering what had drawn my companion's fire,

there was a great flopping overhead, and he cried, "look out." I jumped one side, just in time to escape being hit by a winged monster that was falling through the boughs just above my head. Then with a hoarse croak, and a great flapping of wings, the old frog-catcher lay upon the ground before me, almost at my feet.

With the boy's impulse to seize upon everything strange, I reached out my hand to touch him, for he seemed harmless enough to my boyish understanding.

"Look out, keep back," cried the old hunter, but the warning was too late, for the heron's head flashed out just as I had seen it so many times before, and the sharp beak went nearly through the palm of my hand.

I drew back to a safe distance and sucked my wound, but could not keep my eyes off the magnificent old fisherman, who was so much beyond my previous conception of him. I had seen him many times before, but had not dreamed what a mighty bird he was.

This is the way he looked as he lay there, his long slight legs thrust out straight behind, and his long wings stretched to their full sweep.

His predominant color as he lay upon his breast, with his great wings spread, was an ashen blue, and I could think of nothing but a fragment of a cloud, that had been sundered from the blue of heaven, and laid upon the brown earth. His breast was white, edged with black, from which extended two long black feathers, the plumes of this vanquished knight. His underside was chestnut color, broadly striped with white. The long pearly gray plumes that I had noticed attached to the breast in the spring and early summer were gone now, but the tall fisherman was sufficiently magnificent without them.

The old hunter's pocket-rule declared that the great frog-catcher was fifty inches in length from the top of his yellow stout bill, to the end of his tail, and his blue ethereal pinions, that I had seen so often easily win-

nowing the upper air, were nearly six feet in sweep.

Altogether, he was one of the most magnificent fallen cloud-kings that I have ever seen.

To-day he greets you gravely, at the door, as you enter the museum of one of our large colleges in a distant city. He has lost none of his stature, and his eye is almost on a level with your own, but that which made him interesting is gone. He is no longer the frog-catcher, the fisherman, the epicurean who dines upon small crustaceans, and almost anything that would work into the menu of an uncooked shore dinner. He is no longer the tall striding daddy-long-legs, the bird on stilts, or the fragment of a cloud descended to earth. He is now a splendid specimen of the great American Blue Heron, who still stands statuesque, but never strikes.

## CHAPTER IV

### LITTLE MUSKY'S STORY

LITTLE MUSKY was born about the first of February, in one of the conical shaped muskrat houses upon the island in the great river. He had been one of a family of nine rats, for the muskrat always has a good large family. His parents lived in a three-story house, about six feet high, and six or seven feet in diameter. The muskrat houses had been built higher than usual the autumn before, for, by some wild instinct, the wary rats expected unusual freshets in the spring; and their prophecies usually came true. By observing these sagacious little creatures, man can often get valuable hints as to the weather, for many months ahead.

When the winter is to be long and cold, they build the rush and reed walls of their

houses thicker, both to keep out the cold and to serve them as provender. When there is to be high water in the spring, they build their houses high, so that they will not be drowned out when the freshet comes.

The family of muskrats to which Musky belonged had been very cosy in their nicely constructed house, where they nestled close to their mother's warm fur, and were content. It was several weeks before they were large enough to crawl about, but they grew much faster than other small creatures, so in two months they were exploring the house for themselves.

Before the spring freshet came they were large enough to go outside, and run about in the tunnels that the old muskrats had made in the snow. These tunnels were very winding, and led from point to point, where provender had been stored.

About the middle of April, there were several days of hard rain, and the ice in the river broke up, and the spring flood began.

At first the three conical houses on the is-

land had seemed very secure, for they were on a high point, and several feet above water. But an ice-jam was formed in the river below, and the water rose rapidly. This was something that the rats had not expected, so, like the wisest of us, they were taken unawares. Soon the water came into the lower story of their house, and they went to the second floor. Then that, too, became flooded, and they went to the third, and last. But the water still rose, and the fate of the poor muskrats looked dubious. The water was so deep about their house, that they could not escape by the water-passage, and reach a place of refuge before their breath and strength would be gone. Finally, the floor of their last refuge became wet, and they huddled up in one corner, frightened and miserable.

Then a lucky accident delivered them from the trap in which they had been caught, for a log came rushing and tumbling about in the current, and stove in the top of their house, and their escape was made more easy.

But where should they flee to, for on every side was water, water, water, and nothing but water. It was not placid and inviting, as they were used to see it, but turbulent and angry, and they feared it with an unknown fear.

Soon a long, queer object began slowly moving across the meadows, towards the is land. Occasionally a bright flame would leap from this strange thing, and a thunderous noise would reverberate across the waters. The muskrats did not know what it all meant, but it doubled their fears, which were already great.

Soon the monster drew near the island and its three conical houses, and the old rats became alarmed. They were all out on the top of the house now, and could see the moving object quite plainly. Then the thunder-stick spoke again, louder and more terribly than it had before, and one of the old rats, and three of the children rolled, kicking and splashing, into the river, and the water about them was red with blood. Then a friendly

plank came floating by, and the remaining old muskrat, and three of the youngsters swam and climbed upon it. Bang, bang, bang, went the thunder-stick again, and the old muskrat, and two of the children on the plank tumbled off, as the others had done from the top of their house ; and little Musky was left alone upon the plank, in a hostile and terrible world. But the water was more merciful than man, for the current bore him swiftly away, out of reach of the thunder-stick.

On, on, the current swept the friendly plank, and this queer little mariner was borne far away from all familiar things ; and never again in his adventurous life did he see any of his own family. Sometimes the plank rushed through narrows with a speed that fairly took his breath away, and then it glided gently along, where the river was broad, and not so turbulent. Once it rushed into a whirlpool, and was sent spinning round and round. The poor rat became quite dizzy, and nearly lost his hold, but he

knew intuitively that his only hope was in clinging tight, so he clung.

Several times the plank shot under long bridges, where the swollen waters nearly washed the floor. At another point it shot over a great dam, with the speed of an arrow.

Finally, after several hours, it was carried into back water, and lodged in some bushes, and Musky's travels ceased for a while, for which he was very glad, for it tired him, and made him so dizzy, that he could hardly tell water from land.

Soon another plank came floating by, and lodged still nearer the shore, so he left the plank that had served him so well, and swam to the second one, and from that to an old log, until, at last, he was on land. Here his first care was to eat some last year's dead water grass, and stop the gnawing at his vitals. Then he crawled into a hole in the bank, and went to sleep.

When he awoke, he was sore and stiff, but a run in the sand soon restored his good feel-

ings. There was plenty of good food, both in the wash along the shore, and in the reeds, and water grasses, so he fared very well, as far as food was concerned, but he was very lonely. He had always had a dozen or more young muskrats for playmates and companions, and it seemed strange to be left all alone. He had no idea where the island in the great river could be found again, and soon gave up looking for it.

The second day he made the acquaintance of a drowned-out skunk, which made it a little less lonesome. The skunk did not have very much to do with him, but it was nice just to have some one to look at, and to know that there were other living things, besides himself, that the flood had pushed from their homes.

After about a week, the water subsided, and the river went back to its old channel. The sun then came out warm for the time of year, and dried up the sand. The young muskrat found the sand a great delight, and was never tired of playing in it, but he soon learned

that his element was the water. On land he was awkward, and did not know just how to make his legs go, but in the water they went all right. So he concluded that he was made for swimming, and kept much to the water.

Two very serious mishaps befell him this first summer, which he might have avoided if he had been in the company of wiser heads, but he was alone in the world, and had to buy all his wisdom.

One morning in midsummer, he was playing on the shore, after having made a fine breakfast on lily bulbs, when he noticed a shadow upon the ground beside him. It had not been there a second before, and he wondered what made it. The next second he found out in a way that astonished him, for there was a great flapping above him, and before he knew what was about to happen, a large fish-hawk had wrapped steely talons about him, and strong wings were bearing him away.

With that instinct of self-preservation, that is strong in all wild creatures, and which



CHARLES COPELAND-

A LARGE FISH-HAWK HAD WRAPPED STEELY TALONS ABOUT HIM.



tells them to do the right thing at the right time, the young rat drew himself up, and buried his teeth in the hawk's leg.

The old osprey had caught many young muskrats before, none of them had ever bitten him, but he had taken this one up in the wrong manner. It was so sudden and unexpected, that for a second the hawk loosed his grip, and the poor rat dropped back into the river, with a thud, that nearly knocked the breath out of his body, and left him kicking and gasping on the surface of the water. The hawk could easily have taken him again, but the muskrat's teeth had sunk deep into his leg, and he concluded to go after a fish, instead. Fish did not act in that uncivil manner.

So little Musky escaped this time, but he never forgot the lesson. After that, whenever he saw the fish-hawk hovering above the river, he sought a safe shelter, and was very careful not to show himself until the osprey had gone. Musky's second adventure, and one from which he learned a valua-

ble lesson, was with his worst enemy, the mink.

One evening, when he was playing in the shallows of a little brook, which ran into the river, he saw a slim, sleek-looking animal, not much larger than himself, come gliding noiselessly down the brook. His movements were all stealthy, and his head was turned this way and that, inquiringly. His eyes were sharp and beady, and Musky did not like his looks, although he seemed small and harmless.

Presently the stranger caught sight of the muskrat, and fixed his glittering eyes upon him. This made Musky feel uncomfortable, and, deciding to give the fierce little stranger all the room he wanted, he moved to the other side of the brook, but the mink followed, his eyes getting brighter and brighter. Then Musky concluded the stranger was not to his liking, and fled towards the river, where there was plenty of water, the mink following fast. Out and in among the lily pads they raced, the mink gaining on the rat, and

Musky getting more and more frightened. What could this little Fury want of him?

When they reached the river, the mink was but a few feet behind, and he glided after the muskrat like a snake. In his great fright, the muskrat did the only thing that he could have done to save his life. He knew of no burrow in which to take refuge, so he swam for deep water, and dove to the bottom. His lungs were much stronger than those of the mink, so, by a series of dives, he soon winded his pursuer, and escaped, hiding in the lily pads until he was gone.

After this thrilling chase, the muskrat's life went on quite uneventfully, until the fall freeze. When the rivers and streams began to skim over with ice, each morning, and the grass along the bank was covered with hoarfrost, something told the muskrat, that snow and cold were coming. He knew by some rare instinct that he would not always be able to make his breakfast at the brookside, as he now did.

So, with prudent forethought, he began

building a great mound of reeds, rushes, lily pads, moss, and other plants that grew in swampy places.

Higher and higher he piled this heap of plant life, until it was five or six feet high, and nearly as far across at the base. The inside of this queer haycock he left hollow, and when it was finished he made two channels underground, from the inside of his house, to the brook.

He made these channels quite long, so that his enemy the mink would have a hard time holding his breath if he should undertake to enter at his front door.

This queer house that the muskrat had built was to serve two purposes. First, it was his place of refuge, and shelter, and, secondly, it was his food. Who ever heard of any one eating his house. But this was what the muskrat did, while the winter days went by.

## CHAPTER V

### THE REVENGE OF THE BLUE HORDE

THE warm South wind is dancing a jig down the aisles of the forest. He has been so long exiled from his beloved fields and woods of New England, that he is making up for all he has lost in the winter months that have passed. His boisterous cousin the North wind has had it all his own way too long. It is time he was taught his place, so the South wind is pushing him rapidly back towards the poles, and he is so glad that his hour has come again that he whistles a merry tune upon his pipe as he goes.

How sweet the woods are now he has passed. He was fresh from a race through the orchard and had filled his wings with crab-apple scent and scattered it lavishly through the woods. The wild azalea too he has gently swayed in passing. He has

brought a whiff of arbutus and wild cherry and the pungent wholesome smell of balsam and pine needles quickened into fragrance by the warm May sunlight.

What an important air the South wind has to-day, as he dances through the forest blowing lustily upon his flageolet. You would really think he owned the whole universe.

What a thrill of life is stirring to-day in the half-grown leaves and the bursting buds, in the groping fronds and the germinating seeds.

Now the South wind has passed, the forest is as still as though enchanted. Not a leaf rustles, not a breath is stirring. Hark, what is that? A song in the top of a spruce, low-keyed and liquid. A wonderful love ditty, now it is repeated, softer and more exquisitely than before. What bird in all the forest sings like that? It is not an oriole or thrush, but quite as sweet as either. Then a bough bends and a wonderful blue coat flashes in the sunlight and the most strident, querulous, rasping voice in the forest cries, "Jay, Jay,

Say, Say, Didn't know I could sing like that, did you? Well, I can, when I am a mind to, but I won't for you. Jay, Jay, Jay!"

He flashes out of the tree and across the fields and is gone. A veritable bluecoat, but altogether a noisy quarrelsome fellow, the spy of the woods, always squawking and calling when you want to listen and many times drowning the sweet songs of other birds with his hideous cries. A gay-garmented rogue, all show and bright feathers, but at heart a saucy shallow fellow.

The song we heard this morning was the jay's spring love song. His one musical attempt, that only his mate on the nest with the warm eggs under her can inspire. You did not suspect him of such sentiment, neither did I until I heard him with my own ears.

But there was one menace that May morning to the feathered folks of the woods. It was a silent, stealthy, gliding danger that was always with them. No matter how fresh and green or inviting a grassy plot or a bunch of brakes might look, this stealthy,

creeping danger might be coiled in the sweet green depths.

There was a peculiar enmity between this subtle something and the jay family, for the jays were the spies of the woods. Many a bird's plumage had been saved by the strident squall of the jay. Whenever any of these gay-liveried saucy spies saw the black snake creeping upon its prey, or lying in ambush along some favorite path, or coiled in the trees, the jay would at once set up a great squalling and alarm the whole forest for a quarter of a mile about. Then birds and squirrels would be upon their guard, and perhaps the black evil would go hungry, thanks to the jay's vigilance. So there was a particular hatred between the jay family and the black snake who made the swamp above the old mill-pond and some of the neighboring woods his headquarters.

Down into the peaceful valley by the old mill-pond the black evil went creeping, his head raised about a foot from the ground. Whenever he stopped to consider the head

swayed rhythmically from side to side, in that peculiar motion so common with snakes.

But down in the valley there lived still another crawling, gliding marauder who was feared and hated by all the little water-folks in and about the pond. This danger usually lay coiled up in the lily pads, or on the bank near the water, always silent and always watchful. A danger that young muskrats and frogs were especially fearful of.

The same morning that the black snake left his headquarters in the swamp and went on a journey, a huge dark water-snake crawled out on the bank and took a nap in the warm May sunshine. He was larger even than the black snake of the swamp, and this morning he felt quite contented with the world in general and his own lot in particular, for he had dined upon a half-grown muskrat.

Up, up, from the swale the black snake came creeping, and the young grass wriggled at his coming, while the terror of the mill-pond slept upon the muddy bank. Finally the sleeping water-snake awoke, raised his

head, and looked cautiously about. Something was coming his way, there was a tremor in the grass and this meant a snake. Then a slim head, blacker even than his own, was lifted high above the grass and two eyes glittering and terrible, burning with hatred and glowing with malice, were riveted upon the water-snake.

But what cared he, was he not the terror of the mill-pond? Who was this stranger that dared to invade his kingdom, defy him, and even appear contemptuous of his sway? So he made one or two extra coils in his long powerful form and glared back at his enemy, darting out his tongue with lightning rapidity and returning hate for hate with steady glowing eyes.

The black snake lifted his head still higher above the grass and came on, circling about his rival and seeking to take him off his guard, but the water-snake always turned to meet him squarely, and neither got any advantage from their position. Seeing that this maneuvering was futile, and being angered that

any one dared dispute the path with him, the black snake finally sprang his length, at his rival. Then there was a quick succession of lightning passes, so fast the ugly heads flashed, that the eye could hardly follow them. Their ugly forms writhed and twisted, squirmed and lashed the grass along shore. Over and over they went, until at last the fury from the swamp, who was quicker than his antagonist, got the hold he wanted and then something happened.

The black snake had caught his rival with a firm grip two thirds of the way toward his tail. Then with a lightning motion the black snake wound his own tail about a small elm that stood upon the bank. With a convulsive contortion he raised his own ugly form in air, and with it, that of the water-snake. Like a long black rope the double length of snake rose and fell, beating the earth, but the third time the black rope made a graceful half-circle, then shot forward with a lightning motion. With a report like the crack of a whip the head of the water-snake rolled into

the pond, while his body writhed and twisted in the grass.

Then the black snake unwound his coil from the water elm and watched the dying contortions of his enemy.

When the wriggling of the water-snake had ceased and it was apparent that he was quite dead, his enemy gloated above him and swelled with pride over his great victory. Then he swam the pond and went into the woods beyond in search of more foes to conquer.

It happened this same morning that a partly fledged jay had fallen from the nest. He was not ready to fly and his parents were in a great dilemma. The old snake heard their cries afar off and knew quite well that some one was in trouble. Trouble for the birds at nesting time usually meant plunder for him, so he hastened in the direction from which the squawling and cries of distress came.

So swiftly and silently the black destroyer came that the first knowledge of his presence

that the jay family had was when his ugly head shot like lightning through the ferns and grasses and his terrible jaws closed upon the fledgling.

The poor victim squawked once or twice, fluttered feebly and was still, the life had been crushed out of it by the destroyer.

Both of the jay parents darted viciously at the snake but he paid little attention to them, and began leisurely swallowing his prize.

Then the male jay rose in the air, high above the tree-tops and flew rapidly away, calling at the top of his strident voice as he flew.

“Jay, jay, pay, pay, flay, flay.”

Another jay in a distant tree-top took up the cry and flung it far on into the woods. Soon another was heard calling and still another and another. The call was answered from across the mill-pond and from far and near the blue-coated rogues came flying, calling as they came, “Jay, jay, pay, pay, flay, flay.”

The outraged father led them hurriedly

back to the spot where the deed had been committed and where the grieving mother still watched the greedy snake swallowing her fledgling. One would not have imagined there were as many jays within ten miles as soon flocked above the snake, all squawling with rage and fear. Each moment the cries grew louder and soon the birds began darting viciously at the snake. There was something ominous in this cry of fury that steadily grew in volume and intensity. The black destroyer had frequently killed young jays and the offense had gone unpunished, but now something very much like fear came over him, and he slunk away into the grass, feeling actually afraid for the first time in his life.

As long as he faced them and struck at them whenever they came too near, he had been comparatively safe, but now he had turned tail and was fleeing, it was different.

At the moment he showed the white feather, the whole angry horde fell upon him like furies. A half dozen darted down at



THE WHOLE ANGRY HORDE FELL UPON HIM LIKE FURIES.



once, picking at as many places in his wriggling black coils. He turned and struck and his motions were so quick that the eye could hardly follow him. Two wounded jays fluttered down into the underbrush but what cared the rest. The horde was aroused and nothing but blood would atone for the murder that the snake had done.

The black fury could not strike in a dozen places at once and some of them were sure to wound him. Soon his skin had been broken in many places and he was covered with blood, but none of his great strength was gone. A half dozen beaks tore at his tail and he turned writhing with pain to strike at these tormentors. At the same instant a jay struck him fairly in the right eye and that organ lay out on his cheek and was useless. This was the beginning of the end, but his end was terrible, as was his desert. Never punishment fell from heaven upon the guilty more swiftly or surely. In a few seconds more his other eye was gone, and he could only strike blindly and thrash and

writhe in convulsions of pain. Slowly and relentlessly they picked and tore at the writhing mass. In five minutes after the battle began, the snake's skin was stripped to ribbons, his entrails dragged upon the ground and he was so torn and pecked that his own mate would not have known him. Thus was justice meted out, and the black destroyer went the way that he had sent so many helpless fledglings.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LITTLE FISHERMAN

THE Little Fisherman and I were rivals upon the same stream and that is how I became so well acquainted with his manners, morals and habits of life.

Although he was an expert fisherman, it would hardly be fair to call him an angler, for he did not angle but merely fished. So while I sought by cunning baits to catch my fish, he took his whenever they came in sight, like the bold fisherman he is.

The first time I saw him was a bright April morning when I was threading my favorite trout stream. It was the first day of the open season for men, but the little fisherman fishes in season and out, and the warden always condones his offense.

Just above my favorite trout hole a grace-

ful water elm spreads its broad branches far over the stream and my rival was perched upon one of its overhanging branches, which was dead and quite free from twigs. This gave him an unobstructed view of the water. He was standing like a statue, with his head bent forward watching the water intently. He was so intent on his game that he did not see me, so I had a good view of him at our first meeting.

He was a plump chunky fellow, with a blue coat and white markings underside, and his head was adorned with a bright bristling crest of blue feathers, which gave him quite a jaunty appearance. His legs were short, and when he plunged into the stream a few seconds after I discovered him, I saw that his wings were also short for his size. His first attempt was a failure and he came up, dashing sprays of bright brook water in every direction, but he had the true fisherman's patience, for he went back to exactly the same spot and fell to watching the water as before. He did not have long to wait, for

in a minute or two he dove again and this time he brought up a minnow about three inches in length, which he swallowed so quickly that I did not know where it had gone until he caught another.

Just after he caught the second minnow and again took his place on the dead limb, he saw me and at once set up such a chattering, sputtering and rattling, that I knew he considered me a trespasser while in his own mind he was the owner and proprietor of the stream.

I was not frightened away by his clamor, neither was he very much afraid of me, for he kept his perch and continued to scold until I was within forty or fifty feet of him. Then he flew away up stream scolding louder and more raspingly, if possible, than before. He was angry and there was no disguising the fact, for he darted viciously at the water as he flew and his whole manner indicated that he was much put out.

I always spent considerable time at the deep hole under the old water-elm, for it was

usually good for two or three nice trout if one worked it carefully.

So when the little fisherman came flying back after about half an hour he found me still on his favorite preserve. There was nothing to do except scold, which he did with a vim. But he soon flew away, and I did not see him again that day.

It was nearly two weeks after my first meeting with the little fisherman, that I saw his mate. As I had fished the stream that they inhabited thoroughly for three miles of its length, I am confident that Mrs. Kingfisher had just arrived. She evidently had lingered behind, to enjoy sunnier skies, while her lord went ahead to spy out the country and stake out their claim.

How she managed to find the spot that he had chosen among so many streams and rivers I do not know. This was their first year upon my trout brook, so there must have been some prearrangement. I do not imagine that this particular Kingfisher just happened along and fell in love with Mr.

Kingfisher on the spot, but rather that their courtship had ripened before they came to my neighborhood.

Mrs. Kingfisher was marked very much like her mate with one striking exception. Both had the blue and white livery and the bristling topknot, but Mrs. Kingfisher had in addition a broad dull red belt or girdle that gave her a somewhat gay appearance. This is contrary to the general styles prevailing in bird-land, where the males usually wear the bright feathers and the females the more modest dresses.

Very soon after the appearance of the second Kingfisher, both set to work upon their dwelling. If you are not acquainted with the habits of this most interesting bird you never could guess how the new home was made.

It was by a mere accident that I discovered the nest. I was sitting upon a sand-bank a few rods above where the stream entered the mill-pond, when I noticed a small pile of dirt on the bank near me. It did not look

like the work of the creatures whose burrows I knew, so I laid down my pole and examined it carefully.

The hole extended directly back into the sand-bank for about four feet, where it abruptly ended. This was a queer burrow and whose work it was I could not imagine.

There were footprints upon the loose sand that were certainly made by a bird, but I did not at first associate them with the hole. Finally I gave it up and went on fishing, following the stream down to the pond.

Here I discovered the Kingfishers very much engrossed with taking minnows, which were quite plenty in the shallows along the edge of the pond. When they discovered me they set up a great clatter and chatter as usual, but finally flew up stream and alighted upon the sand-bank ; or rather disappeared in it. I watched and waited for some time to see what had become of them and finally my patience was rewarded by seeing a shower of sand thrown from the queer burrow I had discovered. The Kingfishers had entered the

hole and were carrying on some sort of excavations, the object of which I did not at once discover. But now I knew whose work the hole in the sand-bank was, it was merely a matter of patience to discover the whole truth.

Mr. and Mrs. Kingfisher had retained the habits of their snake ancestors and were making a hole in the ground for their dwelling-place.

Day by day the pile of sand on the bank increased and the burrow was made longer. After it had gone straight back for about five feet it took a sharp bend, and went about three feet further. Then concluding that this was a safe distance underground, the birds hollowed out a chamber, perhaps a foot in diameter, and the home of the fisherman was ready for his mate. Mrs. Kingfisher took possession and soon shaped the floor of the chamber according to her own ideas of a nest. It was ultimately lined with fish bones, which was the only kind of a lining that would have suited its occupants.

As soon as she had laid her eggs, Mrs. Kingfisher excluded her mate from the nest and began her long and monotonous task of hatching the eggs.

At this point in the housekeeping of Mr. and Mrs. Kingfisher my boyish curiosity got the better of me and I could not longer resist the temptation to know what was going on at the end of this queer burrow, so I invaded the home of the fisher-folks to find out. This was a very unwise thing to do, as it might have broken up the nest, and I should not advise any boy to do likewise ; but in this case the life within went on as though nothing had happened. I do not think that any other mother bird would have been as unwilling to leave her eggs, and as fearless of intrusion as was Mrs. Kingfisher.

I first thrust a withe into the hole until it would go no farther. This gave me the direction of the hole and its length to the bend. Then laying the pole upon the ground outside, I was able to dig down for a foot and a half and strike the tunnel just at the bend.

Here I again introduced the stick and got the direction of the remaining three feet of the burrow, so I could dig straight down upon the nest.

A fox burrow can be explored in this manner and it will save a great deal of digging. This burrow will sometimes be forty or fifty feet long with many twists and turns, but by introducing a pole the nest at the end of the tunnel can be discovered merely by digging three or four wells to the depth of the burrow.

I uncovered the nest of the Kingfishers with the greatest care and discovered seven white eggs, but neither Kingfisher happened to be at home. After examining it carefully, I replaced most of the dirt, but by inserting a board, the nest was left so that it could be examined any time with little trouble. This arrangement afterwards averted a tragedy in the Kingfisher family, so I justified my meddling act from this incident.

The second time that I visited the nest Mrs. Kingfisher was on the eggs. Although

she scolded and bristled when I lifted the board and let in a ray of light she made no attempt to leave the nest. I was lying upon my stomach peering into the hole when the long snakelike head of a weasel was thrust into the chamber containing the nest. This thirsty bloodsucker had evidently entered the burrow before my coming and had just discovered the sitting Kingfisher. I could see his nostrils dilate and his cruel hungry eyes glow at the sight of the prize so near at hand. He moved his head to this side and that, and then sprang upon the Kingfisher's back. I still held the board that had covered the nest in my hand and reaching down knocked him against the side of the nest where I had just room enough to grind the life out of him with my board.

There is scarcely a living thing that I care to kill, but the weasel is one of the exceptions to this rule, and it was with considerable satisfaction that I picked up the dead body of the weasel from the nest that it would have destroyed, merely for a few drops of blood.

The proprietor of the strange nest probably began sitting about the first of June and the young were hatched a little after the middle of the month.

They were as strange a lot of fledglings as ever made a nest ugly, with short legs, large heads, and not even a sign of fuzz on their bodies. Their mother, who is short-legged and short-winged herself, could not brood them as readily as a bird mother usually does, so they huddled together for warmth and she hovered over them keeping them warm as best she could.

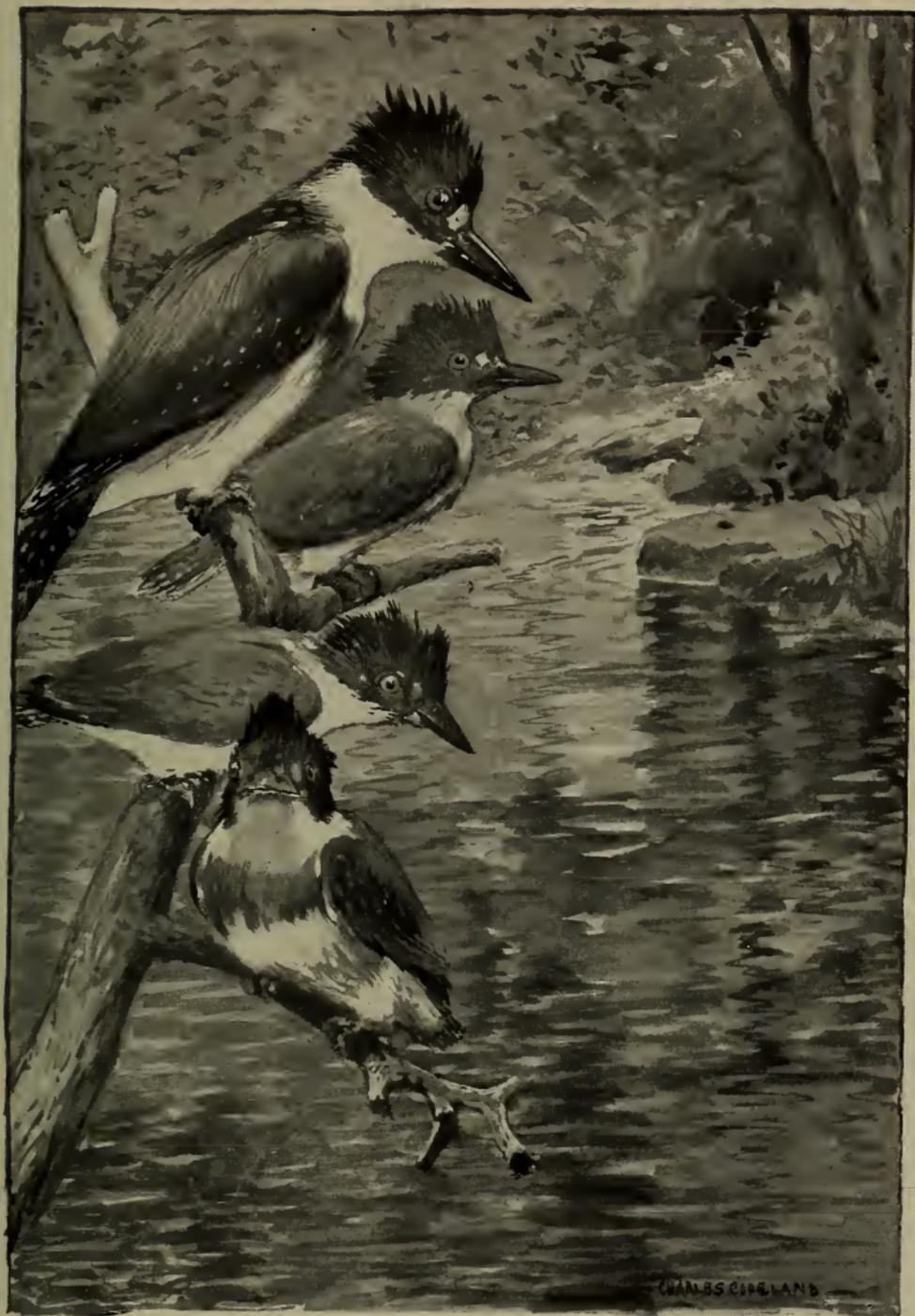
All the time that his wife had been incubating the eggs Mr. Kingfisher had been catching fish for her, or occasionally he would take his turn for a few minutes on the eggs while she went for an airing.

After the young birds were hatched Mr. Kingfisher redoubled his efforts in fishing, for he now had eight hungry mouths to feed. So whenever he caught a minnow, instead of swallowing it at a single gulp, he would fly away, with the fish flopping in his beak, and

deposit it before his numerous family. If it was intended for one of the young birds, either he or the mother bird would predigest the fish before giving it to them. This was done by first swallowing the fish and then when it had become soft and suitable for the crops of the young Kingfishers, it was gulped up and fed to them.

I am afraid that Mr. Kingfisher occasionally went hungry himself during these arduous days of feeding his family. But it is certain that he did nothing but fish all day long.

It must have been a great relief to him when his noisy family was at last driven forth from their underground nest and taught the art of fishing, which they learned much faster than one would have imagined. But they were a family of fishermen and the instinct of swooping for fish was born in them. In the case of this particular family the instinct was supplemented by several lessons in fish-catching. I do not say that the young birds would not have learned of them-



HERE THEY SAT NODDING AND BLINKING.



selves, but they were certainly helped by the example of their elders.

I was lucky enough to see the family the first day that they came into the bright world, which must have been very strange to them, after the life underground. There was not the usual fuss of young birds in learning to fly and although their wings are short, after seeing the old birds flying about calling persistently to them, the young birds tried their own wings. Three flopped up beside their father on the old maple stump where I had so often seen him perched, watching intently for fish. Here they sat nodding and blinking and probably wondering what kind of a game it was going to be.

Then Mr. Kingfisher dove into the water and brought up a minnow and dangled it tantalizingly before them. He did not give it to them at once but preferred to arouse their eagerness for fish and fishing.

When he had plunged into the water several times and always brought up a min-

now, one of the young birds a bit more courageous than his brothers and sisters thought he, too, saw great wealth in the waters below merely to be had for the taking. So he struck the stream with a great splash, but soon came up, beating the water into spray and without any fish for his pains. He was not able to fly back to the old stump, but had to content himself with perching on a low bush along shore, where four of his brothers and sisters were.

If the young Kingfisher saw his fish at all, he probably struck too high to get it, for a fish always looks much nearer to the surface of the water than he really is. Every boy who has used a fish-rod, knows how the butt of his pole will seem to bend just beneath the surface of the water, when he thrusts it into the stream. This is due to light refraction. Of course the young Kingfishers, or their parents, know nothing of light refraction, but every Kingfisher knows that he must strike deep if he would get his fish.

Seeing that his brother was not injured by

his plunge, another young Kingfisher soon followed his example. He too came up flapping the water in every direction and making a great fuss about the ducking that he got. But after the fact had been made plain that fish came from the stream and that they could be gotten in some way, if one only knew just how it was done, Mr. and Mrs. Kingfisher caught no more fish for the young birds, for they knew that hunger would be the greatest incentive to the young Kingfishers and that it would drive them to make efforts to catch fish for themselves, that they would not make for mere sport. So combining necessity and fun, and encouraging them by their own example, the old Kingfishers had two or three of the bolder of their brood fishing for themselves the first morning. Once they had the trick learned they were all eagerness to fish, and wanted to do nothing else for the better part of the day. It, of course, took weeks and months for them to become the expert fishermen that their parents were, but when they under-

stood that they could get a fish, even once in half a dozen plunges, they were eager to try. Perhaps there was a sort of excitement about it too, just as there is about the fishing that the boy does. But certainly there was great rivalry among them in practising this most interesting art.

When this enterprising family, that fished without hook or line, net or snare, was fully grown, it was a gay and noisy assembly. There were certain favorite trees that overhung the stream where they could almost always be found fishing. These perches were especially adapted to their wants, as they afforded a position not too high up from the water, and one that was free from twigs and leaves. Such trees were usually dead, or dying. Sometimes they would perch two or three in a bunch, while I have occasionally seen the entire seven upon the same limb, all intently watching the stream beneath. At such times as this the rivalry ran high, and it was perilous for a minnow to venture into that portion of the pool.

It was not until the flight woodcock were passing and anchor ice had formed along shore, and hoar-frost hung heavy on the water-grasses and flag, that I saw the last of the Kingfishers. I do not know whether they went singly, or in twos or threes, or as a family party, but certainly the stream was not as interesting as it had been, when this noisy clattering chattering family of little fishermen were gone.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE WATER WEASEL

THE weasel of the waters was really not a weasel at all but a very sleek mink. But his disposition and habits of life so closely resembled those of the weasel that I have given him that name.

The particular member of the family with whom we are concerned, usually haunted a little willow-fringed brook that I have known and loved since childhood. No one could know this sweet little brook and not love it. It was the sunniest, happiest little stream you ever saw, always laughing and singing through the bright day, and gurgling a drowsy lullaby through the starry night.

This terror of the brookside, who was feared and hated by all the small creatures along the water-course, was really very small for so formidable a creature. He did not measure twenty-two inches, tail and all, and



HE WOULD SUDDENLY APPEAR BEHIND AN OLD LOG.



when his sleek coat was off he looked much smaller. His body was round and lithe, slightly arched at the shoulders. His head was small, his ears set closely in his fur, and his eyes were bright and beady.

His movements were swift, and darting. He flashed from point to point along the brook, just as a weasel moves on the wall. His head would suddenly appear from behind a stone, and his bright restless eyes would view you for a second, then he would be gone. Then, would suddenly appear, this time ten or fifteen feet further along behind an old log. You never knew just how or when he moved. The first you knew he was watching you from a new position.

Once I saw the Mink and his mate moving their family to a new home. They were carrying the babies in their mouths, by the scruff of the neck, just as a cat carries kittens. They moved them several rods down stream to a hole in the bank, under the roots of an overhanging tree. The high water had made their old home untenable, so they

had moved out, and rented a new tenement. I think the hole belonged to some of the mole family before the minks came, but they probably dispossessed the former occupants and took possession without as much as saying "by your leave."

When the family of the terror were half grown they were as playful as kittens and would chase one another about with as much zest as young squirrels.

The mud along the bank, near the bright water of my little trout stream, was always dotted with their footprints. So I knew quite well of their pranks, even when I did not see them.

One bright morning the water-weasel started on one of his restless wanderings. He did not know or care where he went, only that he was on the move.

He glided along the stream as silently as a shadow. A very dark shadow he seemed, and his coming was indeed a shadow for many creeping, crawling things that lay in his course. Occasionally he would stop, with

his slight paw raised, looking this way and that. Eager, and restless, furtive and watchful. Then he would glide on like a swift-moving black speck. Near a bunch of lily pads he stopped and peered this way and that, searching under all the pads with his beady eyes.

You or I would not have seen anything animate among the green pads, but Mr. Mink did. Suddenly he darted forward. There was a short scuffle in the water. A violent flopping and splashing and then this sleek scamp dragged a great green bullfrog, kicking and croaking, to the bank. The poor frog is kicking for dear life, and his eyes are bulging out with fright; but his relentless enemy has him by the throat, and there is no shaking that grip. The teeth sink deeper and deeper. The frog kicks and flops, gasps and kicks feebly, and is dead.

Does Mr. Mink eat him? O no, he may bite a hole in his throat, but he will soon leave him and look for another victim. His particular sport is in taking the quarry.

Occasionally he catches a tadpole, or opens a small clam, but best of all he loves to torment frogs. Fish are also to his liking and he occasionally surprises a sleepy sucker, but he is rather too small to be a good fisherman, besides he cannot hold his breath very long under the water. He is much smaller than the muskrat, but the rat will flee for his life, when he sees the glittering eyes of the mink. The hunted rat's refuge then, is in keeping in deep water, for his lungs are much stronger than those of the terror.

Knowing this fact, when the rat builds his house, he makes a long winding tunnel leading to it under water. His particular strategem is to make the water tunnel so long that the mink will drown while coming through it. If the muskrat has to do battle with his bloodthirsty enemy he always meets him if possible in the water tunnel, where the mink loses his breath and is obliged to go to the surface to breathe, to the great relief of the muskrat. Occasionally, though, he can swim the whole length of the water channel, into

the muskrat's house, then he does bloody work.

One morning early in November the water-weasel went upon the last of his bloody excursions along the little stream, and the inhabitants of the water-course, were glad that they saw him no more, with the possible exception of the mink family, who probably missed him from their circle. The morning was clear and crisp, and Mr. Mink felt peculiarly eager for his sport. He had been very peaceable for several days, but now he would make up for it. Many of the frogs had crept under the mould, where they were stupidly sleeping. The small water-snakes too were asleep, but he would find something, somewhere to sate his love of blood. But this morning the hunter was hunted, for he found a dead mouse hanging over a shallow in the brook, and in reaching for it, he set his forefoot in a trap.

He had always been so swift and sure in flight, that it infuriated him to be held in this manner. He bit at the ugly thing, until

his teeth bled. But it still held, and from being a terror, this dark-coated hunter, became a demon as wild and furious as his size and strength would allow. He broke his front teeth on the trap and fell to tearing his own glossy coat. He bit at everything in reach. Foam and blood were on his muzzle. Then he remembered his last weapon of defense, that he rarely used unless cornered, and emitted an odor that is only surpassed for pungency by that of the skunk. But the trap had no nostrils and held on as before.

For half the forenoon the infuriated mink bit and tore, first at the trap, and then at himself, but his fate did not change. The frog would have smiled to see him in this plight if he had known.

When the little terror had exhausted his strength with wrenching, and his sleek coat had been sadly lacerated by his own teeth, a tall creature, walking erect, came stalking along the stream. In one hand he carried an empty trap, and in the other a light club.

He laughed when he saw the mink, for he knew that his small pelt, that would scarcely cover both a man's palms, was worth four dollars of the fur-trader's good money. Then he raised his club, which descended swiftly, and the song of the little brook was stilled in the Terror's ears, and he swooned away into breathless darkness, and was nothing but a sleek pelt.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BOY WITH THE DINNER-PAIL

How often since that memorable day when I reluctantly turned my back upon the old district schoolhouse and went away to the city, have I longed for the freedom and the sweet philosophy of the boy with a dinner-pail. His was a joyous lot and his life was as free as the winds that blow.

In those rich days I owned the world, the birds, the squirrels, the fields and all that they contained.

Nor was I content with owning merely the world, for was not the great free blue sky mine with its treasures of stars, some of which still glimmered when I drove the cows to pasture in the dewy fragrant morning.

Half-way down to the old schoolhouse the boy with a dinner-pail sometimes left the traveled road for a shorter way. This was an old discontinued road so grown with

brush, that one would never have guessed that it had been a road at all, had it not been for a half tumbled down stone wall on either side. Beside these walls grew raspberry and blackberry bushes, and many a good meal they furnished the famished boy on his way home from school. Also an occasional scrub apple tree bore delicious fruit, but some of these wild apples were as sour as vinegar.

One memorable morning, early in May the boy turned into the old disused road as usual and was trotting along whistling a merry tune, when from the marsh near-by came a strange and ominous sound. It was a deep three syllable booming, that rolled across the lowlands and was lost in the distance.

The boy sprang upon the wall, curious and half fearful. It had sounded as loud as the bellowing of a bull and even more resounding, but he did not think it was a bull. Presently he heard it again and this time he was quite certain it was not an animal.

But no sight or sound with which he was not familiar went unchallenged, so he set his

dinner-pail down beside the wall and crept cautiously forward, always keeping some bush or knoll between him and the spot from which the sound had come.

When he had gone a dozen rods into the marsh the strange booming was heard again, this time much plainer. Now the boy was almost afraid to go forward. He had never heard of any creature that could make such a sound as this. Perhaps he ought to go back, but a strange fascination impelled him to go forward.

He now proceeded with still greater caution going on his belly and stopping every few seconds to listen. So carefully this young woodsman stalked the strange creature that presently the deep booming, sounded again, now only three or four rods away.

It could not be a bull, for the marsh was not wooded, and he could see in every direction. So he lay still in the grass and listened. But the marsh was as quiet as though nothing inhabited it.

How strange it seemed. Perhaps it was a



A GREAT CLUMSY BIRD FLOPPED SLOWLY AWAY.



hobgoblin, that would swallow him up. He did not like strange noises that could not be explained. As the silence deepened, a wild terror seized the boy. Somebody or something must move or cry out. He could stand it no longer, so with a yell like a wild Indian he sprang to his feet and swung his hat about his head.

But no fourfooted creature appeared. Instead, a great clumsy winged bird, tall and awkward, rose in air with a startled cry, and flopped slowly away.

The boy had a fleeting vision of long dangling yellow legs, and a large body, of brown and buff with light markings.

He had never seen such a bird as this before, but the mystery of the booming noise still troubled him. It surely could not be made by a bird, but try as he would he could not dispel the idea that the great awkward stranger had been in some way connected with the awful sounds. Mere words could never express the boy's astonishment and disgust on returning to his dinner-pail, to find

it bottom side up and a yearling heifer munching complacently at the last mouthful of a saucer pie that had been baked expressly for him.

Nearly every morning after that the boy heard the queer booming sound in the marsh, and each time crept cautiously toward it, only to flush the strange bird ; but he never saw him make the sound, although he was quite sure now that the bird made it, as there was no other living thing on the marsh capable of doing it.

One morning, while stalking the bird from a new direction, he discovered the nest, upon which the female was sitting. She was not like most birds that the boy knew, for she did not fly away with a great show of fear, when he approached her, but stuck persistently to the nest, even pecking at the intruder. Finally, when the boy swung his hat to scare her, she ran away into the grass, disclosing her treasures to his inquisitive eyes. It was the poorest kind of a nest, merely a few bunches of coarse grass scratched together

in a clumsy manner, with no attempt at lining.

The eggs were large and of a brownish drab, and five in number. It was something to have found the nest of the "great boomer," as the boy called the strange bird, and he now felt quite well repaid for his persistence.

When the eggs finally hatched, and it always seems like a long time to the boy who is watching, the young birds were all legs and heads, and altogether the ugliest fledglings that he had ever seen. He was never quite sure just what the old birds fed the little ones, although he found the fragments of a frog about the nest one morning. Probably grasshoppers, grubs, and small crustaceans also found their way to the young bittern's bills. These awkward, helpless fledglings stayed in the nest six or eight weeks. The boy did not know just when they went, but at the end of eight weeks they were gone, and he occasionally flushed them in the marsh, or along a little stream that flowed near by.

He never expected to have as good a look at the "great boomer" as he finally did, but it came about in this way. One morning near the close of the school year, as he was crossing the marsh, he heard the roar of a shotgun near at hand, and went to see who was out gunning and what the game was.

He soon met Eb Thompson, an old hunter and woodsman, coming across the marsh. In his hand he was carrying a large bird, and the boy saw at once that it was the "great boomer."

"Hello, Eb, what have you got," cried the boy excitedly.

"An American Bittern, and a big one," replied the hunter composedly. "I got him out here by Willow Brook, and he is a beauty. I guess it is the male."

The hunter laid the bittern down on the grass and spread him out to his full length. Then, taking a tape measure from his pocket, he stretched it from the bird's beak to the tip of his tail. It measured twenty-eight inches, which is a large bittern.

His upper side was brownish buff, thickly spotted or freckled with reddish brown and black. His neck was buff, and there was a white line down the throat. There was a patch of gray on the sides of the neck. His whole underside was pale buff striped with brown. His bill was yellow, and his long legs were yellowish green. Altogether he was a gorgeous fellow.

It is no wonder that the boy had been almost afraid of the strange cries on the marsh, when we recall this thrilling description of the sound, as described by Oliver Goldsmith.

“It is impossible for words to give those who have not heard this evening call, an adequate idea of its solemnity. It is like the interrupted bellowing of a bull, but hollower and louder and is heard at a mile’s distance, as if issuing from some formidable being that resided at the bottom of the waters.” Other sounds there were upon the lonely marsh, besides the booming of the great bittern, that fascinated the boy with the dinner-pail. Most

of these sounds were heard in the early spring, and it is then that nearly all creatures are mating, and planning for the new home that shall be their joy for the coming summer. In the early springtime not only the birds and fourfooted creatures become vocal, telling their joy to the world, but also the bursting buds and the greening grass seem to be whispering a language all their own, and so low and sweet that only the finest ear can hear.

One spring twilight the boy was trudging homeward across the lonely marsh as usual. He had stopped to play with another boy who lived near the schoolhouse, so that when he reached the loneliest part of the marsh, it was already twilight, and soft mist clouds were hanging over the lowlands.

Suddenly the boy stopped to listen and almost held his breath in the intensity of the moment. He had heard an old familiar note and wanted to satisfy himself that his ears had not deceived him.

There it was again, and there was no mis-

taking it now, beef, beef, beef. It was a strange hoarse cry rather rasping and without the slightest suggestion of music in it. One would have said on hearing it for the first time, that it was made by an animal, rather than a bird. But the boy had heard it before, and knew it was Mr. Woodcock and that somewhere out there on the marsh, he and Mrs. Woodcock were planning a nest.

Then there was a sudden whirr of wings like a penny whistle with a pea in it, and Mr. Woodcock shot up, out of the mist and went dancing up into the sky, going up in a beautiful spiral, as the eagle does, only the rings in his spiral, were much smaller than those in the eagle's. How joyous and full of good spirits his twilight flight was! Just as though his heart was so light that he had to go up. Up, up, he went, two hundred feet, three, four and five, until the boy could just make him out against the dusky sky. Now he is zigzagging across the sky parallel to the earth, and the whistle of his wings is no

longer heard. Now he is coming down in a long zigzag coast, light as a bubble. But what is that chattering? Che-at-ter, chatter, chit-chee, chatter chit chee, something like the chatter of chimney swallows, only many times louder and sweeter. Now it is fairly poured from the ecstatic throat, the notes following so closely upon one another, as to be almost one continuous stream. Chatter, chit-chee, chee, chee, cheep, cheep, chit, chee. Here he comes over the boy's head, so near that he could have touched him with the new fishing-pole that he cut yesterday. Now the mist has swallowed him, but out on the marsh you may hear the hoarse cry, more like a bleat, than a bird note, "beef, beef, beef."

The boy heaves a deep sigh of satisfaction at the sound, and trudges homeward, feeling that he too must grow like the rest of the world, and be glad like the bird and the young lambs.

But the most interesting thing on the marsh was a family that lived in an old

water-elm, near the little footbridge, that crossed the brook.

One morning the boy was sitting upon the little bridge, breaking off bits of bark, and snapping them into the stream. He did this just to see if there would come that sudden flash of something bright, a swirl in the water and then an eddy to tell where the trout had jumped. This was the small boy's favorite pastime, when he had a minute to spare near the brook.

No trout rose this morning to his sham bait, but presently he heard soft wings winnowing the air above him, and looking up saw a small beautifully marked duck passing directly over his head, and a second later it alighted in the old water-elm just below the bridge.

The boy had never seen a duck alight in a tree before, but he had read of the duck who lives in a tree, and knew at once that this must be the wood duck, or summer duck, as it is also called.

The boy was still more interested in this

duck when it disappeared in a hole in the tree, a few minutes later. He could hear an occasional low quack or croak, or murmur in the hollow tree, so knew there must be another duck inside. Soon the second duck came out and flew away to the woods, and the boy saw that she was rather smaller than the first duck, and not so gaily dressed. This was the female. She had gone to the woods for some of last year's beechnuts, or acorns, or any other kind of nut that she could find. Perhaps if she found nuts scarce, she would pick up some weed seeds on the marsh, before her return. There must be a nest, thought the boy, else the two ducks would have gone together. The male bird had stayed to keep the eggs warm while his mate went for her breakfast. He would climb up to that hole some morning and see.

All through the evening thoughts of what might be in the bottom of the hole in the old water-elm haunted the boy, and he dreamed that night of climbing the tree and falling into the stream for his pains.

The next morning on his way to school, he examined the tree to see if he could climb it. It was dead and almost without limbs and looked like quite a proposition. But the boy was all curiosity to know what was going on in the hollow, which was about twenty feet from the ground, so he got a stone from the bed of the stream, and drummed on the old stub.

“Wake-up, wake-up, wake-up,” said a voice in the tree. It was not a quack, but more like a croak, or a whistle. Then the boy saw that the beautiful duck whom he had first seen the day before was sitting on a limb near the hole keeping watch. He looked half asleep himself, and the admonition might as well have been given him.

For answer came a low drowsy murmur in the hollow stub, which plainly said, “Wake-up, yourself. I am all right. What is the matter anyhow?”

The beams of the morning sun fell full upon the little drake who was apparently keeping watch in the tree and the boy thought

he had never seen a more beautiful bird. He was a small duck, about eighteen inches from the end of his bill to the tip of his tail. His head and crest were metallic green and purple, which colors refracted the sunlight in many rainbow hues. About his eyes were some white spectacles, and he wore a white necktie. His underside, of which the boy had a good view, was chestnut and white and in front of each shoulder was a black and white crescent. His wings were largely purple and green, like his head, and when he flew the sunlight played upon them gorgeously.

The boy discovered the following day, when he climbed up and peeped into the hole, that the female was not as brilliant as her mate, being brown and gray, and very modest in her appearance.

Each morning the boy shinned up on a pole borrowed from a neighboring fence and peeped into the hollow to see how things were getting on. The first morning he discovered that there were six creamy eggs,

about the size of small hens' eggs, only they were more pointed than the hen's eggs, and as near as he could make out, there was a new egg laid each day until there were thirteen or fourteen. Sometimes the little drake was keeping watch in the tree and would cry "Wake-up, wake-up, wake-up," but when the boy began climbing the tree he would fly away, though he did not seem to be much afraid. The female duck always stayed on the nest after the first morning. When the eggs were all laid they were covered with down which looked as though it came from Mr. Wood Duck's breast.

Frequently the boy would see Mrs. Wood Duck flying away to the woods or just returning and then he would know that her mate had been keeping the eggs warm.

He did not know just when the eggs hatched, for the farmer claimed his fence pole and this broke up the habit of climbing into the tree each morning on the way to school, but finally when he got another pole

and climbed up, the eggs were all gone but one and the nest was empty.

How the little ducklings ever got down to the water was another mystery, but an old hunter told the boy that the mother duck usually carried the little ones down to the water in her bill, taking them one at a time, by the wing, or their little red webbed feet.

About a week after the disappearance of the ducks from the old water elm, the boy discovered the whole family in a large pool further down stream, all swimming about and having the finest kind of a time. Both of the old ducks were with the brood caring for them, but the ducklings seemed very active, swimming and nibbling away at water-grass and in all ways appearing quite like their elders.

One day the boy discovered a bloodthirsty mink gliding along the bank, intently watching the duck family. He hurried to a neighbor's house and borrowed a gun and kept guard over his precious ducklings for three hours until this fierce water-weasel again

appeared when he shot it, and the ducks were rescued from a grave peril.

After school closed the boy did not have occasion to use the unfrequented road across the marsh and through the meadows where the duck family lived, but he occasionally went around that way just to see how they were getting on. As the summer advanced they were seen less and less often on the stream and more frequently along the edge of the woods. Finally in September they lived almost entirely in the woods, only going to the water when they felt the need of a swim and a bath and some water-grass diet, with which to vary their regular breakfast and supper of acorns.

The boy never knew just when Mr. and Mrs. Wood Duck led their handsome family on that long flight southward, but he never saw them after about the first of October.

Probably they went in the night, as so many birds of passage do, when the dusky mantle shields them from curious eyes. Perhaps if he had been standing at the little

bridge just at dusk he might have heard them winnowing by overhead, uttering their soft call notes. But this glimpse of them, if he had been lucky enough to have had it, would have been very fleeting.

But one thing is certain, he never passed the little footbridge and the old hollow water-elm but he thought of the little drake who had watched in the tree and advised his mate of danger.

Even if the old tree was forsaken now, and the marsh lonely and desolate, perhaps they would come back again in the spring, when Whistle-wings, the woodcock, would dance his love dance in the twilight sky, and the hoarse cry of the jacksnipe would be heard in the land.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE TALE OF A TURTLE

IT was a pleasant afternoon in August, with just enough haze to subdue the sunlight and give warm, rich color to the landscape. The day was more like Indian summer than August, so tender was the sky and so hazy was the atmosphere. Bass were not biting, but what cared I as long as the blue sky was above me, the fresh green earth at my feet, and the sweet air in my nostrils.

There were other things to be interested in that summer afternoon besides bass ; so I sat under the old birch and trailed my line heedlessly in the water, dreaming a sweet day-dream while the silver-footed moments slipped noiselessly by, all unconscious of the joys they held. From across the stream came the musical tinkle of a cowbell, reminding me of

boyhood and driving cows to pasture through the dew-laden grass where the clover smelled so sweet when you stirred it. I could almost smell it now across the gap of some twenty-five years.

The stream lapped the roots of the old black birch with a low pleasant sound, and the wind sighed softly in the tree-top. All was restful and quiet. Each hour seemed cut from the calendar and hung like a golden apple, ripe and ready for plucking.

Then I leaned back against the rough trunk of the tree, rested my rod across my knee, while the winds and the water crooned a pleasant lullaby, and Mother Earth invited me to rest. Somehow it all seemed familiar, like a leaf out of an old dog-eared book. Was it my mother's crooning and the warm human breast I remembered? I know not, but the day and the hour did their work and I slipped into the realm of mystery.

“Having any luck, Mister?” asked an odd little voice at my feet. I looked down in surprise, for I had not imagined any one

about, but could see no one who could be addressing me. Then a large round something in the grass on the bank moved, and I saw a green turtle about the size of a milk pan eyeing me curiously.

“Getting any fish?” asked the queer voice again. I started.

“What, were you speaking?” I asked in astonishment, for I had never heard a turtle talk before. “I wasn’t aware that any one was about.”

“Maybe you don’t consider me any one,” said the turtle ironically, “but there are others who do. Why, there are cooks down in New York who would laugh with glee at the very sight of me. I am considered one of the choicest delicacies ever set upon the table. That is why I have to look out for my shell. I am what you people call a hard-shell, hard outside but soft inside. That is better than being soft outside and hard inside,” and the turtle winked knowingly at me.

“Have you always lived here?” I asked.

The deep hole under the old black birch was a favorite fishing spot of mine, and I did not remember ever having seen so fine a specimen of the turtle family there before.

The turtle laughed a dry little laugh and looked very scornfully at me as he replied, "I guess you don't know much about the turtle family." "Why, I have an ancestor in the Isle of Wight who is known to be many hundred years old. Even I have seen seven or eight generations of your race come and go and I am still hale and hearty and sure to outlive you, my fisherman friend. Do you know, I have been having great sport with you this summer, by nipping your worms from the hook when you were fishing with a bob. You thought it was bass, and that made me snicker. I might tell you all about that big bass that you nearly landed. What a joke it would be if you had merely hooked into my shell!"

I blushed and looked sheepish. That big bass which I had nearly landed had been a favorite yarn of mine and I was thinking of

writing up the incident for a sporting paper, but now it would not do.

“Where did you come from if you have not always lived here?” I asked, for I was getting interested in what seemed to be a remarkable turtle.

“Why, I was born at Leyden,” he replied, “I was one of several million eggs that my mother left in the sand, but the rest were all gobbled up by an otter.”

“How did you get here?” I queried.

“It is a rather long story,” said the turtle, “but I will tell you if you wish. You need not bother about your line; you will not get any bites now I am on the bank.

“I was found by a Leyden goldsmith when I was a baby turtle, about as big as a silver dollar, and he kept me for two years in a glass globe and was very proud of me. The customers used to peer in to see me, and I was quite as much of a curiosity as the green parrot in the window. But finally, I got so large that I could not be kept in the globe and then the goldsmith let me go, putting

me down among the wharves, where I picked up a good living.

“By the time I was twenty years old, I had grown to be quite a respectable turtle. I was not like the rest of the family, for I was given to wondering what was doing in the great watery world about me and on the dry, hot land. Most turtles simply eat anything that comes their way and bask in the sun the rest of the time. But I wanted to know more about the world. I used to wonder about the great ships that were always coming and going. So finally one day, when the wharves were pretty well deserted, I climbed up to the gang plank of a ship and went aboard her. I was waddling about on the deck having a fine time, when I fell into a deep hole and went rolling and tumbling clear to the bottom of the ship. I kept pretty quiet for two or three days ; in fact, I could do little else, for I could not get out of the hole. But by and by I felt the ship moving and that interested me. Things went on very well for about a month and I

was quite happy, for now I was traveling, something that I had always wanted to do. But one day a man came down into the bottom of the ship after something and discovered me.

“ ‘Hello, my fine fellow,’ he cried, catching me up by the tail. ‘Here is a find. I will take you to the galley and we will have turtle soup for dinner.’

“Cookie was tickled enough when he saw me, and I thought my day had come. I was perched upon a great table awaiting my fate, when a dignified white-haired man wearing a long black coat, entered.

“ ‘What have you here, Thomas?’ he asked pointing to me.

“ ‘That’s our dinner,’ replied Cookie with a laugh.

“ ‘You will have to kill him, won’t you?’ asked the man in the black coat.

“ ‘Why, of course, Elder,’ said the cook. ‘You didn’t think I would boil him alive.’

“ ‘Certainly not,’ replied the grave one, ‘but I do not think it will do. If we spill

blood upon this ship, we shall not be prospered. Turtle soup would make our humble rations relish, but we must not risk it. We are on a long and hazardous journey and must have a care.'

"So I escaped."

"Did you ever learn the name of the ship?" I asked, now being thoroughly interested in the turtle's story.

"Of course," he replied. "You didn't think I would cross the Atlantic in a ship and not learn her name. It was the Mayflower, and my preserver was Elder Brewster."

"Impossible," I gasped. "You do not mean to tell me that you are nearly three hundred years old."

"Certainly I am," replied the turtle, "and probably three hundred and twenty-five years would be nearer my age. You know the turtle family is noted for long life."

"I do not believe it," I replied, "you are spinning me a fish story."

"Just turn me over then, and see what

you see," he rejoined. I did as I was told and saw the letters "E. B." and the numerals 1628.

"What does that stand for," I asked, for I did not at first catch the significance of the lettering.

"Elder Brewster, 1628," replied the turtle. "He marked me when he let me go. I was a young turtle then, but now I am getting old. I used to have the name of the goldsmith who kept me in the glass globe at Leyden on my shell, but as my shell grew, it was obliterated."

"How did you get here?" I queried. "This is the Connecticut."

"I came up in an English ship, which was fired on by the Dutch at Hartford, but we took possession of the land and have kept it ever since. I suppose I ought to be a Dutch turtle, but I have always been with the English so much that I call myself English."

"What other adventures have you had?" I asked. "You seem to be the most remarkable turtle I have ever known."

“Well, I got aboard a flat-boat one day and was going to the Sound, but I heard the men talking about letting the ship that they were going to meet take me to New York, and sell me to a restaurant. So I slipped overboard and gave up going to sea. Then about fifty years ago, when they were building the great dam at Holyoke, I got my shell cracked. That laid me up for quite a spell, but it finally grew together and I am quite as good as new.”

“I believe you are a monstrous story teller,” I said solemnly, when the turtle had concluded his story.

“Well, you are another,” he retorted. “Didn’t you tell about hooking a big bass, when it was nothing but my shell?”

“Look out, I really believe you have got a bite, and me out of the water too; I shall have to investigate,” and he slipped down the bank towards the water.

“Hold on,” I cried, “I want to ask you more questions. Did you really—” here the tugging at the pole became so vigorous that



I DROPPED MY POLE AND SPRANG FOR HIM.



I aroused myself and gave the line a slight jerk to hook my fish. Where was the turtle? Had it been a dream? Or was it a waking reality?

I looked along the bank. The green mottled back of a huge turtle was just slipping into the water. I dropped my pole and sprang for him. A look at the under side of his shell again, and then I would know. But I was too late. Although I waded to the top of my hip boots, and thrust my arm into the water to the elbow, the black shape slipped away into the deep water and only a few bubbles told where this most remarkable turtle had gone.

It was too bad. I should never know. It would always remain a mystery.

**THE END.**









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