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WHITE-EAR AND PETER



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WHITE-EAR AND PETER

THE STORY OF
A FOX AND A FOX-TERRIER

BY

NEILS HEIBERG

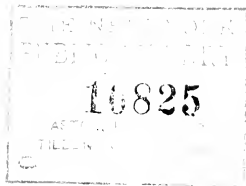
WITH SIXTEEN COLOURED PLATES BY CECIL ALDIN

For all that has life certain common laws exist compared with which all other things are without importance, carried away as they are like leaves before an autumn storm.

N. H.

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1912



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As the Boy-Scout Movement is closely allied to outdoor life, I have the honour to dedicate this book to its leader and Chief Scout, Lieutenant-General Sir R. S. S. Baden-Powell, and to all his boys in different lands.

To those who have eyes for the beauty of Nature and who search in her for the eternal truth, and to all those who are lovers of animals and champions of the weak and defenceless.

N. H.

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PART I
SOCIETY

It is easy to be a gentleman, when one has no sorrow for the morrow.

I

PETER was the name of a little fox-terrier, brimming with life and energy. In the stables he behaved like an autocrat, and woe to the dog that ventured to challenge his supremacy! He was not disinclined to extend his sway to the kennels as well, where the great fox-hounds had their quarters, but there he was repulsed with determination by Dreadnought, senior hound and great-grandfather of the kennel. Peter had to content himself with holding command in the stables, but here, by way of compensation, he lorded it supreme.

The hour was nine in the evening. All was quiet in the stables, the day's work ended. Peter entered upon his usual round of inspection to see whether all was in order, before finally going up to Black Diamond, the Master's favourite mare, in whose stall he spent the night.

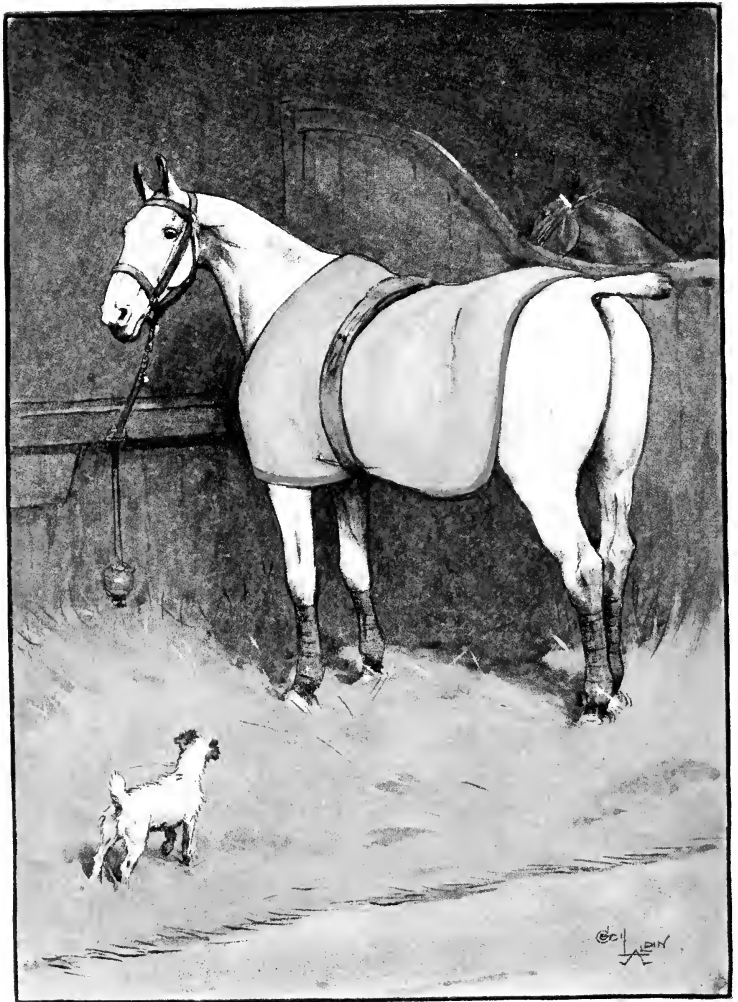
A salvo of barks heralded his coming.

But there was no one who took any notice of Peter's voice—it was too well known for that. The horses champed quietly away at their evening feed. One alone started up. This was Nelly, who had not been at the stables more than a few days, so that she was not yet quite accustomed to being disturbed at meal-times in this objectionable manner.

Peter halted by her place, and took stock of her superciliously. But Nelly did not even look at him; she nuzzled away again at the last remnant of oats. Peter's stump of a tail began to swing nervously, faster and faster, a certain sign that he was irritated, and he gave expression to his displeasure with a low growl.

‘Did you ever see anything so impertinent!’ This had never happened to Peter in his long practice as guardian of the stables. Not even to turn her head and say ‘Good-evening!’ Upstart and outsider! The point was to make himself respected at once. It would be more difficult later on. So with a peppery snap he flew like a rocket at Nelly's heels, the mare in a fury lashing out behind her. The assault, however, came too much as a surprise, and when Nelly, with a squeal, let out with





Peter marched past The Pretender.



her hind hoofs, Peter had already long since beaten a safe retreat. He stood there contentedly and watched the new-comer with a malicious air. A few sharp snaps formed his parting admonition to Nelly—to show at any rate common politeness another time.

Peter marched with conscious dignity past The Pretender, an ancient veteran of the hunting-field. He turned his head in a grave 'Good-night,' and Peter responded with a friendly nod. *They* understood each other. There had never been any disagreement *there*. No; next to Black Diamond, he was Peter's best friend in the stables. How often had not The Pretender gladly submitted to Peter's ensconcing himself on the saddle-peak, when, tender and sore-footed after a hard day, he was about to commence the homeward journey! Peter was not the one to forget past favours.

Then there was Ambra, a seven-year-old bay mare. Yes, quite true, she had been stubborn enough when she first came to the stables. As quite a new-comer she had begun in exactly the same way as Nelly, by ignoring Peter completely. But, ye Gods, how he had let her feel his teeth!

She was now quite cured, and was one of Peter's most loyal adherents.

With a gracious yap Peter paid a visit in her stall, and, jumping up on to the edge of the manger, entered into a lengthy conversation with her.

Hadn't she heard the Master say how surprised he was at the way Ambra had improved in her jumping lately?

Peter had heard it right enough, he assured her eagerly, as Ambra doubtfully shook her head. It was that day when The Pretender went head over heels in a blind ditch. The run had been long, and he had been allowed to sit on the saddle-bow with the Master on the way home. Oh yes, Peter could assure her on his honour, the Master had said to the first whipper-in that he was going to ride Ambra himself next season, so pleased was he at the progress she had made; and, Peter added, with a solemn side-glance at The Pretender, *he* would soon be fifteen years old, and had begun to get stiff, and did not last over long distances as he used to. . . .

Ambra nodded gravely back, obviously relieved; she had certainly understood that things had taken a turn for the better, though she had heard nothing definite. In any case, she was glad Peter had told her,

for nothing was worse than this fatal uncertainty. She had even believed that she was to be sent away from the stable, and there could be but one reason for it—her inborn terror of ditches, especially ditches with water in them. But she had now come to understand that they had to be taken, and that really they were not so awful after all.

Peter had no more time to spare, and with an encouraging glance continued his round.

Quietly, looking neither to the left nor to the right, he passed three or four horses, with whom he stood upon a footing of complete indifference. He only peeped up slyly to see that they paid him the due evening salutation—a respectful inclination of the head, which he most graciously returned. Two of these were but carriage-horses, and in Peter's opinion little better than parasites in the stable. The other two were hacks, one of them somewhat larger than a polo-pony, and he had noticed that this one was always in the first line in the hunts he had taken part in. He had then carried the Master's youngest son, a lad of twelve. The horse was called Tom, and was a little wiry-haired blue-roan ruffian,

of a capricious and uncertain disposition ; it was rumoured that even Peter was nervous of him. He had once only by a hair's-breadth escaped a crack right on the top-knot from Tom's heels. Peter shivered at the very thought of it. Best keep such fickle gentry at a distance, he thought, and trotted on.

Peter came to a sudden stop and looked attentively towards the kennels, which at the Manor were specially arranged in such a way that one corner of the enclosed courtyard was separated from the stables by a row of thin iron bars.

Wasn't that Dreadnought's head that came into view over there by the railings? And he had the cheek to stick his nose out, the ass!

Dreadnought was Peter's avowed enemy. They had been in battle once before, on which occasion it had nearly been all up with Peter. He was still inclined to drag his near hind-leg slightly as a result of the encounter.

Of course it was an affair with a lady that was at the root of the mischief.

Purple, one of Dreadnought's consorts, who, for that matter, might easily have been Peter's grandmother, had commenced

a flirtation, and—well, Peter was not slow to take a hint!

He would take his affidavit that was the true explanation—that was the whole story, innocent enough, you see, nothing to get so excited about.

But Dreadnought had been furious, and Peter thought his last hour was come. Luckily the Master came up and dragged the offended husband away. He got a whipping afterwards, too! And Peter recalled with satisfaction and pride how, on many a previous occasion, he had got off easily, although the fault was really his. One had to be smart in this world, by Gad!

Besides, these fox-hounds took everything far too seriously. They held quite a mistaken view of life. They were honest, solid, and reliable, all qualities that Peter looked up to, and of which he also considered himself to be possessed, but they couldn't stand a joke, and that was a great fault in a dog. For them existed but one way, and that was the way straight forward, dead on the track of the fox—no by-ways, such as a little terrier like himself so often had to take if he was to get there in time.

Like a fury Peter began to cover him

with abuse, for the railings were strong enough—they were made of iron, so he had nothing to fear. But Dreadnought only stood and looked contemptuously down on him, and then walked calmly away, tired of the din.

All was in order now, all quiet for the night, and Peter went up to his best friend, Black Diamond, who stood waiting for him.

The black mare, the ornament and pride of the stable, whinnied with pleasure. She always left a little hay in the manger, so that Peter could lie softly, for there was a tacit agreement that he should pass the night there.

With a jump Peter took possession of his wonted place, and now began a long chat: first complaints against Dreadnought; and afterwards they told each other hunting-stories, these two good friends—a conversation that was far too long to repeat here.

It was midnight before the talk died out, and the whole stable breathed peace and rest for renewed work next day.



Clicko's chief mission consisted in being a sort of article
of decoration.



II

BESIDES horses and hounds there also lived at the Manor a cockatoo called Clicko, whose chief mission consisted in being a sort of article of decoration, for she really brightened the place up with her fine colours.

She seldom said anything, but whenever she did open her beak, both horses and hounds took well to heart what she had to say, for it was a well-known fact that things always turned out as Clicko had said.

Lord knows how old she was—no one had any idea, not even Clicko herself. She had seen life born, live, and die out, and she had herself lived at the same time as the great-great-grandfathers of the horses and hounds with whom she now shared existence.

Clicko was wise, for she had not attained her great age without going through a good deal. Besides, she was tolerant towards

others, as, indeed, all sensible cockatoos are, and she lived an introspective life, content were she but permitted to remain in peace. She thought much, and wondered most of all why she had ever come here, where there was so little sun, where it was cold and raw, and there were no birds of the same family as herself.

A dim recollection often dawned upon her of a better existence, a better land, and a more bountiful scheme of life. It was more particularly at night she dreamed like this ; but it also happened that these fairy visions appeared to her in the daytime, for Clicko would slumber often enough even in broad daylight. Her fancy would then run away with her, till she lived in a world of her own, far from her surroundings, and revelled in mighty forests, where all sorts of strange trees grew in a wilderness of splendour, but of palms and red and yellow blossoms were there most.

When these scenes rose before her Clicko always shut her eyes, as if not to let them go again. She could even be so self-oblivious at such moments that she would tumble off her perch, right upon the head of a little mouse-grey polo-pony, who at last got so accustomed to these surprises that

they did not disturb him in the least, except when he himself stood and slumbered.

Clicko spent her time perhaps more in the kennels with the hounds than in the stables, for she found it cosier and warmer there. Thus she sat one day, bunched up in a corner, as the morning light fell in through the oblong windows, and a pale sunbeam stole cautiously over the head of a sleeping hound, to hide itself away in a corner among the straw, which it lighted up to a bright yellow. Little by little the sun ventured further out, till at last it let itself fall with full power in through the windows over a row of canine forms, that lay lazily outstretched upon the fresh-strewn straw.

The kennels, over which but a moment since perfect quietness had reigned, now wakened to life. Clicko alone still sat sleeping.

The hounds with one accord raised listening heads into the air. Yes, there could be no mistake, they heard the step of Jim, the kennel-boy, which at this time of day meant a new hunting-day for them. He seemed, however, to be taking his time, and when at last the door was thrown open, the hounds pressed so eagerly out that old

Priestess got squeezed between the door-post and Knight's sinewy form, and cried aloud with pain. So keen were they all to be first out that they leaped over one another and bowled one another over in the crush.

Those that had been at the last meet flew restlessly about in the kennel whimpering, for they were to stay at home. One could see them through the bars giving vent in various ways to their impatience and disappointment at having to remain behind.

Wanderer was picking a quarrel with Dexter. Purple was surly and took advantage of her sex to snap with impunity at all who came near her. Pilgrim lay and stretched his right paw through the wood-work, and then strove in vain to draw it back, emitting the while loud howls of complaint, which, however, attracted no particular attention. Gainer, on the other hand, submitted quietly to his fate, and lay curled up in a corner on the straw, whilst he licked incessantly his good friend Lady, who, cross and sleepy as she was, made attempts to protest against his disturbing her morning rest even in this friendly way. Dreadnought drew himself up to his full height and looked thoughtfully after the departing pack, pressing his nose out

through the bars, whilst he meditated seriously over some means to steal after them.

He had succeeded in doing so once before. . . .

He asked Dexter whether he would join him in risking the attempt, for Jim would soon be there with breakfast, and then there would be a chance to slip out as he stood in the doorway.

But Dexter put on a surprised face, and asked whether he had taken leave of his senses, for he would on no account risk a licking, and in the second place he did not intend to miss his breakfast.

It made a difference, though, when Dreadnought told him that the last time he had done something similar he had not got a beating at all, but the Master had evidently been amused at his so unexpectedly joining the other hounds, who were already in the act of drawing a covert when he announced his arrival. He actually liked it, for it shows initiative and interest, and the Master even gave him a hearty welcome, added Dreadnought persuasively.

Then Dexter, evidently with more relish for the project, asked what they were in that case to do about breakfast; but Dread-

nought could think of nothing better to suggest than that they must hope to lunch off a fox—or they might even dispense with food altogether, and go all day with empty stomachs.

However, there was no time for Dexter to consider the latter alternative, which seemed to him a very hard one; the door was opened suddenly, and he saw Dreadnought, without waiting for any answer, dart with a determined spring between Jim's legs. Dexter himself made at the last moment an attempt to follow his lead, but was grabbed by the neck and thrown, none too gently, back into the kennel. He just managed to get a glimpse, through the doorway, of Dreadnought streaking like greased lightning across the yard.

Clicko the cockatoo was by now wide awake, and, discovering at last what Dreadnought was up to, shrieked with her piercing voice—

'Ye hang-dog, pilfering villain!' for there was nothing that disturbed Clicko's equanimity more than a change in the programme for the day, whether it affected herself or others.

Dreadnought kept to the high-road a long way before taking to a woodland path,

which brought him out in the open fields. Here he saw the whole hunt patiently waiting for the hounds to find a fox, and he arrived just in time to hear the Master call them back with a blast of his horn, after they had drawn in vain for a full quarter of an hour.

He was discovered first by Peter, who challenged him and demanded the meaning of his presence there. But without deigning to notice so unfriendly a reception, he paid his respects to the Master, who seemed to be surprised, but wished him a laughing 'Good-morning.'

He exchanged Good-days with Black Diamond, and then, without bothering himself in the least about Peter's furious protests, assumed his usual position in the forefront of the hounds, where his arrival evoked loud-tongued acclamation.

And so he got his extra day of hunting, and that a successful one ; for when he came home late the same evening he related to Dexter, whose eyes sparkled with envy, how they had killed *three* foxes, two of which he had found himself.

With the remark that one must never let a chance slip by, he threw himself down on the straw and stretched his tired limbs

luxuriously, whilst Pilgrim and Wanderer curled close up to him and warmed him, as was but right and fitting towards the father of the kennel.

Clicko was already sitting in her wonted place, dreaming herself back to her native India, where the trees were so big, and the flowers so red and yellow, and where there were so many other cockatoos, with whom she was friends. . . .

III

ONE late autumn evening a cold and bitter wind swept up the valley. The naked tree-tops swayed backwards and forwards in the gathering storm. The moon had no strength that evening ; only now and then could she break through the dense bank of storm-clouds that hurried along before the autumn wind.

Peter's home lay desolate and deserted. The storm, that raced howling over the stable-buildings, dragged and tore at all that lay in its way.

There came a gust that flung wide the door to the kennels.

No, there could surely be no hounds there, or else there would have been music !

A ragged little bundle flew suddenly out of the door as though shot from a cannon, and that was our friend Peter.

How frightened he was !

He had heard that Dreadnought was not

at home, and so, out of pure politeness, he had gone into the kennels to pay a call on the hounds on sick leave, and then that ass of a kennel-boy had slammed the door to right in front of his nose.

Peter dared not think of the consequences this visit might have had, if pure accident had not permitted him to escape. It would have meant death if Dreadnought had caught Peter in his sanctum, and his heart jumped into his mouth for very terror.

Quivering and quivering he flew along the country road. It was the deuce of a night, and he was glad he had not been out with the hunt that time.

He made up his mind to meet the hounds, and took to a bypath to come upon them in the rear ; for he knew that Dreadnought was always the leading hound, whether it was easily and comfortably along the beaten high-road, or in full cry on the hunting-field.

As he jogged along, he philosophised upon the uncertainty of this life and the unpleasantness of always being at warfare and having to be on his guard.

Black Diamond was quite in the right when she said he ought to conclude peace, for, so help him, this state of things was

getting unbearable in the long run, and Peter at last came to the conclusion that either he or Dreadnought must go. The only question was which of the two could best be spared, and doubts began to pester his soul. He knew that Dreadnought was the father of the kennel and the Master's pride.

But who was to look after the stables, if it really came to the point, and Peter had to withdraw?

Past this question his dog-sense could not get, and he decided the case resolutely in his own favour.

In the meantime, it was perhaps best for safety's sake to conclude peace, for human beings could often be so capricious, and he made up his mind that he would the very next day consult The Pretender, whose years gave him experience, as to how he should set about this important matter.

Yes; so it should be!

Suddenly he started out of his conciliatory mood, and his expression changed in a moment from half-mournful brooding to acute attentiveness; for he had caught a whiff of the hounds, and he swore a silent oath that he recognised Dreadnought's objectionable odour.

He stood still a moment intent and listened, and at last he caught sight of the foremost hounds, who, with drooping heads, came slowly swinging in upon the private road that led to the stables.

‘Yes, they must have had a hard day,’ he thought, and sprang to one side, not to be seen.

There went Dreadnought by, in the van, right enough. He enjoyed the privilege of walking alone, at his own sweet will, whilst the rest of the hounds must with a good grace keep behind the Master.

So now he was safe, and he jumped, barking, over the ditch and hailed The Pretender, who was ridden by the first whipper-in. But The Pretender was too tired to enter into any lengthy conversation. He only said it would be good to get food and rest, that the day had been more than usually trying, the going hard, and that he was sore-footed and stiff in the joints and knees.

He told him also, with satisfaction, that they had hunted as many as three foxes, but had unfortunately lost one of them after half an hour’s hard gallop, and he dragged at the curb as he quickened the stiff gait peculiar to him.

He had galloped many a good mile in his life, poor fellow, and he showed the traces of it now.

Peter extended his call to the Master, carefully spying for the danger which he was now drawing suspiciously near, and began a lively chatter to him, telling him all was well at home, and that Wanderer, who had got a splinter in his paw, had stopped limping.

But his friend the Master was also too tired to talk to him; he only called his name in a friendly way, and tossed the reins over to the groom, who stood there with a huge stable-lantern, that cast a dazzling gleam right in their eyes.

Even Black Diamond was not in the mood to-night. She stood there thoroughly worn out, with trembling knees, and confined herself to rubbing her nose against him in dumb greeting.

The hounds pressed in through the kennel door, and Peter, who in the heat of the moment forgot what his thoughts a little while ago had been so eagerly occupied with, was careless enough to put his nose in at the entrance.

But Father Dreadnought, who was always the last hound in at night, caught

sight of him, and flew with implacable fury at his throat.

Peter wriggled and bit ; he understood that his life was at stake, and he held his own in the desperate struggle, for he was lither than his adversary, who had difficulty in getting a hold on him.

In wild fury they rolled each other about the ground, each trying to get at the other's throat. Yet the battle must have ended to the confusion of Peter, who mainly confined himself to the defensive, had not the Master and the stable-man come up at the critical moment, and, catching both the warriors by the neck, shaken them emphatically.

Peter stood quivering with excitement—so near to death he had never been before ; and when the Master took him in his arms with comforting words he whimpered pitifully.

Dreadnought's teeth had left their traces ; several scratches on his chest, from which the blood trickled redly, showed the marks. But the Master examined them carefully and declared that they were of no importance, and with a friendly 'Good-night' Peter hobbled back to the stables to make his wonted round.

His bark this time must have had a

strange, subdued ring, for all the horses turned round after him, and even Clicko the cockatoo, who never mixed herself up in other people's business, asked Peter, as he passed by, what was the matter, but, getting no answer, she only retired still more deeply into herself and her dreams.

Peter tried to appear indifferent, and assumed a sour expression as he made his way straight to Black Diamond, who received him with an enquiring glance. With an ill-humoured yap he jumped painfully up into the manger, for the old wound in his hind leg had opened in the heat of battle, and at last he settled down in his usual bed.

When Black Diamond sympathetically enquired whether anything was wrong, the only answer she received was that he was nervous and tired, and that to be responsible for a stable of seventeen horses was many a time sufficient to reduce more than one fox-terrier to despair. Besides, he needed quietness, and could not agree to any more gossiping in the evening ; after which, with a sulky 'Good-night,' he turned himself about in the manger and tried to go to sleep.

There was not much question of sleep, however, for his dog-brain was hatching

vengeance. The wish for a restoration of good feeling which had occupied his mind a short time ago gave place to the darkest schemes for 'Revanche.' The projects that he now nursed were nothing short of murderous.

Many a 'turn' went through Peter in the course of the night. Nervous spasms shook his little form from head to tip of tail.

Many a half-suppressed yelp caused Black Diamond to start out of her sleep, and she began to find Peter a troublesome bedmate.

'Yes, Heaven knows, he must be plagued with bad dreams, poor little fellow,' she thought at last, nosing sympathetically towards her little friend, who lay quaking softly.

But no! now it was really getting too bad, and Black Diamond got quite cross, as with a smack Peter was lying on the floor, and stood there shivering, half-asleep.

To his comrade's enquiry as to what was wrong with him, he answered something about being sick of it all; and, jumping up into the manger again, pretended to be asleep, though he did not get a wink that night, for he had dreamed a little while ago that Dreadnought stood over him with a throat-grip.

By degrees, as the night drew on, he came to a more conciliatory frame of mind, and when the first rays of the sun stole in through the stable windows he had determined to arrange a reconciliation at the first opportunity, and that he would consult The Pretender quite confidentially on the point that very day.

IV

THERE was a rattling of chains and a scraping of hoofs. The whole stable, which but a moment ago was buried in drowsy morning stillness, came now suddenly to life. All the horses turned their heads and whinnied, for they heard that familiar, somewhat trailing step that every horseman has, which told them that now came a visit, which they knew was repeated regularly three times a day—a visit that all would miss if ever it failed to come.

It was to their overlord, the Master, that they extended this reception, even before they saw him.

Peter was the first to wish him the top of the morning, and his greeting was taken up all down the line.

And now a call was paid in every stall and box, a sojourn invariably productive of mutual pleasure.

Peter never failed to be present at these

visits, and to make a careful mental note of every confidential remark the Master and the groom exchanged. Each of his friends received a report later.

He knew enough to tell them in advance of all that was to happen in the stables, and it was perhaps just this omniscience that formed the strongest foundation of his authority.

He had escorted the Master out, and now returned with the joyful tidings that all who had been at the last meet were to have a week's rest, and only to be exercised for an hour, walking and trotting.

With a peppery bark or two he raced after a few sparrows that were sitting on the corn-bin nearest The Pretender. These small birds led a somewhat modest and precarious existence as free guests in the stables, keeping for the most part to the window-sills and the neighbourhood of the corn-bin, where they lived on remnants rejected by others. Clicko the cockatoo they regarded in the light of a revelation, for they had never seen a bird with so many resplendent colours, and they arranged regular concerts to her glorification, without, however, venturing to make any advances to her.

With one alone were they on terms of intimacy, and that was The Pretender. With him they displayed familiarity, and were as forward with him as they were shy with others. But that was because they were used to seeing him in the same place year in, year out, and he never did them any harm, poor fellow, but submitted quietly to their perching on the edge of the manger, and sharing his ration of oats.

Peter stood surveying with satisfaction the little grey sparrows which had ensconced themselves fearfully in the window-ledge over The Pretender, and then went up to him, and said teasingly that the week's rest would do his drum-sticks good.

But The Pretender would never let himself be teased; he only munched quietly away at his hay—the other horses had long since finished theirs—and moved to one side to make room.

'I have a secret,' whispered Peter, after a moment's hesitation—'a most important matter,' he added, drawing nearer.

There was a lengthy pause. Peter expected The Pretender would say something, but he only champed deliberately away, for he was so used to Peter's secrets, which the whole stable knew about.

But Peter did not allow himself to be discouraged by this seeming indifference, and went on to relate how he wished to conclude peace with Dreadnought, but did not know how to do it, and therefore desired a word of advice from the wisest horse in the stables.

Peter saw with delight that his old trick of flattering The Pretender's vanity did not fail of its wonted effect, for the taciturn gelding's tongue now began to wag so fast that he clean forgot to go on eating.

He looked at Peter, and opined that this was a very difficult question, the solution of which called for more than ordinary horse-sense. Still, in this case there was but one thing to do, and that was to go straight to Dreadnought and beg pardon.

'For,' he added confidentially, 'when gentlemen fall out about a lady, a situation of great seriousness and extreme delicacy arises, leading as a rule to bitter enmity'—yes, he even knew of cases in which the matter had ended with the death of one of the parties.

'It is impossible to advocate any other course,' said The Pretender, with a wag of his head, 'than, either to keep out of the way, or to beg pardon'—besides, it was not

at all certain that Dreadnought would pay any attention to an application of that kind — ‘such a step might even result in a hiding,’ he concluded, and looked at Peter reflectively.

‘Of apologising there could never be any question,’ snapped Peter suddenly, with such irascibility that The Pretender backed with surprise, and out of the stall he flew, dropping as he did so a few remarks about The Pretender’s intelligence that were not exactly flattering.

But Clicko, who had been sitting in the window-sill and heard the whole conversation, said, as much to herself as to The Pretender, that it was a scandalous affair, which would be the cause of many calamities, as was always the way when any one meddled with other people’s business without having the right to.

And Peter caught quite distinctly how Clicko expressed a pious wish that he would go to the dickens.

So Peter continued to live on the same strained footing for weeks, yea months, as his canine vanity would not permit him to sue for pardon.

But, one of the last days of the season, in April in fact, he was disturbed in his mid-



Just at this moment up came Peter.

day nap by a violent hullabaloo in the yard. It was two Scotch sheep-dogs who had come in, but had run across Dreadnought, whose turn it was to be out, and who was whiling away the time with promenading about outside the kennels. As father of the kennel Dreadnought had the privilege of enjoying his liberty, and not always having to go with the other hounds, when they were shut up in the kennels after hunting.

To Dreadnought's curt but polite enquiry what they wanted there, they had made no answer, but had assumed a comparatively peaceful bearing, only, however, as though at a given signal, to hurl themselves upon him.

Just at this moment up came Peter. Whether he recognised an opportunity to display his magnanimity, or acted out of pure love of a fight, or perhaps did not think at all, is not for us to decide. The fact remains that he launched himself into the fray with all the strength at his command, and soon turned the day against the unbidden guests, who at last took to flight, with Peter in pursuit.

On his return he had the satisfaction of seeing Dreadnought come bounding towards him, with such open manifestations of

friendly feelings as could not be misunderstood. And his satisfaction reached its zenith when Dreadnought himself proposed a reconciliation, which Peter with dignity accepted.

He was quite moved as he thanked Peter for his assistance, and Peter himself was all embarrassment, or at any rate fell out of his dignified rôle, for he vowed that he desired nothing more than friendship, and that he had long wished for it.

If they had never been much together before, they made up for it that afternoon; they walked about chatting the whole time, and at nine o'clock that evening, when the Master came to say good-night, he found them wandering side by side in the stable passage, while the horses turned wonderingly round after them, and old Pretender cudgelled his brains to find out how on earth Peter had managed to settle this affair.

'Oh, I expect he has taken my advice and made an apology,' he thought, reassured, and commenced his evening feed.

Clicko the cockatoo, however, did not know what to believe about it. She only declared in her own mind that Peter must be a smart little chap, as, indeed, she had always thought.

V

THE first signs of spring were in the air.

The earth was drenched and sated with the winter rains, and lay ploughed up ready to receive the seed.

Yes, spring was come in earnest now, for the trees were beginning to sprout in the soft air, and the meadows, where the grass had already begun to grow, found gladness in the increasing warmth of the sun's caress.

'I am afraid Saturday's hunt was the last of the year,' remarked Peter thoughtfully one morning, as he surveyed the fresh life that Nature was unfolding.

'I believe you are right,' answered Dreadnought dejectedly, and went to the kennels, where his pronouncement caused general depression.

Peter stayed behind meditating.

It was just possible that a change in the weather might set in, though he had not much faith in it. . . .

Suddenly he caught sight of some horses, who were galloping up and down in a meadow, far off, to keep themselves warm this chilly morning. Perhaps it might be worth while enquiring as to the prospects there, he thought, and darted off in the hope that it might be so.

The horses came to a halt in their wild chase, but, in answer to all his bewildered questions, did but stand there and gaze at him, huddling close together in wonderment, with the gentle glow of the spring sun caressing their beautiful forms.

Clicko, who kept indoors the whole autumn and winter through, was just essaying a flight, lured into the open air by the first real sunshine of the year, and was flapping sorrily and helplessly over the meadows.

But it was soon right-about and back to the stables, where she remained a few weeks more, before venturing out in earnest ; for Clicko knew very well that she had a weak chest, and was already a victim to incipient bronchitis.

At last Peter's eyes seemed to be opened to the untenable nature of the situation, and he sneaked off to the main building, where he found the Master in the act of packing

his trunks, which made him so doleful that he ran about whimpering ; now he knew that hunting was irrevocably over for the year, and, what was still worse, that the society, which had almost become necessary to his very existence, was to suffer a lengthy interruption. Further meditation was cut short by the Master's calling to him and saying they would take a turn in the stables.

There he grew still more desperate, for the news he heard put him quite out of spirits.

He heard the long discussion between the Master and the head groom, the many orders that John had to write down, so as not to forget them.

Black Diamond was to go !

A training stable was to try what could be made of her—she had both speed and endurance, and was a splendid fencer ; there must be the makings of a good steeplechaser in her.

Then came The Pretender's turn, and Peter could scarcely believe his own ears.

He was old now, declared John—turned fifteen—and could not stand another season ; it would be best to sell him to a farmer, field-work would do him good.

But the Master would not hear of his

passing into other hands. One could never know what sort of treatment he would receive. He did not like to sell horses that had served him faithfully so many years. Better an honourable bullet, and renounce the few pounds he might fetch.

Nelly had been a disappointment and was to be sold, as were some other horses, to whom Peter had formed no particular attachment.

‘Yes, it is decided, then,’ concluded the Master, ‘you put a bullet through The Pretender to-morrow morning; but shoot him somewhere half a mile off, so that the other horses notice nothing;’ and he went into the stall to say farewell to him.

The old gelding could not understand what was afoot, for the Master mixed him with his own hands his midday feed, a daintier feed than he had ever tasted before. There were carrots and apples, and finally he got a substantial feed of oats, served him by the same hand. What was more, the Master stood by him all the time he was eating and coaxed him, by way of thanks for all his good work.

But what made him most confused was Peter’s solemn mien. His wits were incapable of interpreting all this, and he asked

himself with dismay whether, after all, there could be anything in the doubtful remarks Peter had made some months ago about his intelligence.

That day Peter was not himself. He could not make head or tail of it all, and kept pottering about everywhere.

It was The Pretender's fate that was uppermost in his thoughts. He did not know what position to take up, for the whole responsibility and superintendence of the stables rested on him, after all.

Ought he to prepare The Pretender for what was to happen, or should he say nothing?

In his perplexity he flew to Dreadnought and consulted him.

The fox-hound, to whom truthfulness and honesty were everything, counselled him to prepare The Pretender for the morrow's happening, for perhaps some future state awaited even animals after death. . . .

So, late that evening, quite forgetting inspection, he went up to The Pretender, in a state of quite unusual uncertainty. He sat himself down on the edge of the manger, and began to talk of how the season was now definitely over, and several

friends were to be parted. He did not hear The Pretender's remark that it was always so at the end of the hunting-season, but continued talking about friendship that could not last to all eternity.

Black Diamond was to go to a trainer, Nelly was to be sold, and other changes also were impending.

But The Pretender was not so stupid after all, for he could understand a hint.

He said quite calmly that he felt old and worn out, and that it would not come upon him as a surprise if he, too, were to be banished now.

'We old people, you see,' he said to Peter, who sat with his eyes fixed on the stable floor, 'must make room for the rising generation some time.'

And so, at last, it came out of the little fox-terrier, who had a heart of gold, that he had heard—unless, that was, there was some misunderstanding—that there was to be a change for The Pretender too.

But the old horse said quite calmly that he was on safe ground, there was no misunderstanding here, and that he only hoped he was not to be sold.

On this occasion, too, Peter forgot his

rôle, as he assured him on his honour that there would be no question of sale.

‘Then there is but one thing left,’ said The Pretender gravely, and looked at Peter, who simply could not say what that was. The Pretender thanked him for his kindness of heart, and said that all life was transitory—he would only wish it might be soon, as he now knew what was coming.

So Peter whispered, with sobs in his voice, that it was to be to-morrow morning.

Black Diamond waited and waited in vain for Peter, for he spent the night with The Pretender.

The queer part of it was that Clicko did not sit that night on her wonted perch over the mouse-grey polo-pony either, but took up her quarters in the window-sill over The Pretender, where her unexpected appearance sowed confusion in the encampment of the sparrows.

Here both The Pretender and Peter heard her sighing deeply in the course of the night, and felt sorry for her in their hearts; it was a well-known fact that Clicko suffered from an aggravated chest complaint, and there was not a single horse or hound but was certain that Clicko would one day die of consumption, for cockatoos are liable

to this insidious disease when they come to chilly Europe, accustomed as they are to India's warm and sunny climate.

The next morning a strange man appeared in the stables with a gun on his shoulder. Nobody but Peter knew who he was. He had seen him at the rifle-club, of which the Master was also a member, plant shot after shot, side by side, in the bull. It was the crack shot of the countryside, an old game-keeper from the neighbouring preserves.

It was with no affectionate feelings Peter received him, for when he saw him go into the stables with the gun he flew with a snarl at his calves.

A few sparrows that were pecking at grains of oats on the stable floor flew up in a panic, and fluttered against the window-panes in their vain efforts to escape, but settled at last in the oblong window-sills, where they crouched with their heads under their wings.

The stranger paced up and down the stables, whilst Peter stationed himself by The Pretender, where he sat waiting, lost in his own meditations.

Peace had again fallen upon the stable for the moment.

One after another the sparrows were already venturing to skim down to the floor, and resume their previous occupation, in which they had been so rudely interrupted.

However, John, the stud-groom, soon came up, and they rose in a flock to ensconce themselves again in the window-sills, there to await the return of stillness.

The now almost white Pretender—in his youth he had been dapple-grey—cautiously put his head out of the stable door, whose upper hatch John had thrown open to let the fresh April air stream in.

Dreadnought must have said something after all, for when Peter looked to see what The Pretender was so busy with out there, he saw a number of fox-hounds, with Dreadnought at their head, gravely exchanging a few words with him, before, one by one, returning slowly to the kennels, after each had bidden him a last farewell.

The Pretender was now led out, and as he left the stable he neighed a farewell greeting to all his comrades, and gazed around on all sides with uplifted head and distended nostrils, as though he would take in at a glance a last impression of the place where he had had his joys and sorrows in life.

The veteran's parting salutation met with its response, a response that made the whole stable-building ring again.

But as he went past the kennels the hounds began suddenly to howl in chorus, and did not cease their lamentation until the sound of his hoof-beats was lost in the distance.

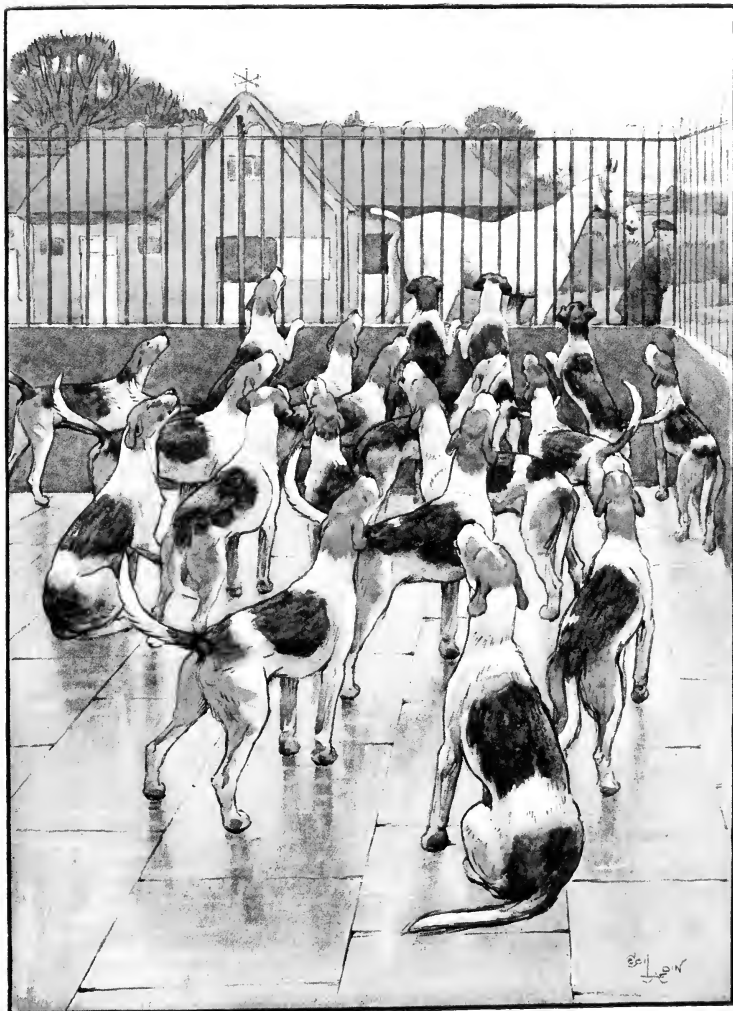
It was their sorrow at being parted from a faithful friend, whom they had always seen keep in the front line in the hunting-field, and whom they therefore bore in mind.

Peter escorted him on his way, beside himself with sorrow. He whimpered and carried on so that The Pretender had to beg him to be calm, for he only made the parting worse.

At length they arrived at a little smiling birch-copse, where The Pretender was tied up and given a little hay, which he did not touch. He only stood still and looked at John, who again stood irresolute and looked at the old keeper, and at last all four stood there gazing at one another.

Peter could stay no longer, but took leave of The Pretender in a manner that brought tears to the two men's eyes, so that they slowly turned away.

The hounds began suddenly to howl in chorus.



When the last good-bye was said, he turned resolutely about, and flew with his stumpy tail between his legs, as fast as though his own life were at stake—flew as he had never flown before, even in the days when Dreadnought was after him ; and he never stopped running till he was at home, where he hid himself in a corner of the hay-loft, and stayed there for four whole hours before venturing again into the light of day.

There stood Black Diamond and Nelly ready to start.

First he spoke with Black Diamond, but in this case the parting was not so trying, for he knew that they would meet again next spring. It was only in the interim that she was to try her luck on the racecourse.

Of Nelly he took a short but hearty leave, wishing her luck on her future journey through life.

He went with them a little way along the road, and then slunk back to the stables. But here he found no peace, so he went up into the main building, where he learned that the Master was to leave by train, no later than the next morning.

During the afternoon he wandered distractedly about, incapable of settling down anywhere. In the stable he found it too

empty, so he made himself comfortable in the kitchen, where he spent the night, without, however, getting many winks of sleep.

Early the following morning he accompanied his master to the station, and tried to board the train, but was inexorably kicked down by the guard.

At last he stood alone upon the platform and gazed after the quickly departing train, which soon was lost to view.

Ten full minutes he remained standing there, looking in the direction in which his master, dearer than aught else to him, had disappeared.

Then at length he jogged off home, with drooping head and ears, trudging along in the middle of the road, with the spring mud splashing him up to the eyes. But he was impervious to everything, for he was thinking of all his friends who were gone, of the happy time he had had, and of the monotonous days now in store.

In the early spring morning the labourers were beginning to go to their work in the fields. With generous hand the sower was strewing the seed in the open furrows, which smoked with freshness and the promise of future fruit.

VI

To begin with Peter went about moping, and was out of spirits. It was not exactly sulkiness that ailed him, but rather melancholy ; nor had he yet reached the age at which dogs of his breed are accused of being irritable.

But, as time went on, he began little by little to cheer up. After all, it was not a characteristic of his to dwell long on a thought, and he decided to make the best of the tiresome monotony of his daily life.

Thus it was it occurred to him that perhaps it would be a pleasant occupation to get married—in any case he had nothing better to do just now.

These reflections of his were in the main the product of a casual acquaintance, made on the roadway one evening when he was out for a walk.

As Peter was strolling along, engrossed

in his own meditations, his interest was aroused by a little dog of the same breed as himself, that ran barking towards him. Hello! Peter was ready in a moment to make its acquaintance, and, discovering to his joy that it was a lady, he immediately introduced himself with all the due formalities in vogue among dogs.

In the course of conversation Peter learned that his new acquaintance, whose name was Beauty, had come to live there, and belonged to a neighbour. She had already been there over a week, and was bored to death, not having met any one as yet with whom she cared to associate.

‘But,’ said Beauty finally, eyeing Peter suspiciously, ‘I don’t think you are so well-bred as I am, for you have such a common nose.’

It was true that Peter had somewhat too short a muzzle, although his blood was of the purest, and he knew it himself very well; but he interposed with the utmost decision that most people considered his nose very shapely, and, so far as his descent was concerned, his parents and grandparents, and to the best of his knowledge his great-grandparents too, had all been prize-winners.

With the remark that the shape of his nose was most assuredly a characteristic peculiar to his own family, the possession of which also had its advantages, Peter assumed for the moment an indifferent and offended air, which completely overcame Beauty's misgivings, for she now assured Peter that she had meant no harm with what she had said, but was so very, very pleased.

Then Peter vowed that he was still more pleased, and gallantly offered to escort her home.

The more he saw of her, the more charmed he was. He firmly believed that he had now met 'The One,' and swore that Beauty should become his wife, or he would never marry at all.

Under the pretence of making a short cut, Peter took his charmer a long *détour* through a dark wood, where he soon found a fitting occasion to declare his sudden and warm affection.

When he awoke the next morning he remembered, to his dismay, that he had plighted his troth the preceding evening, and even talked of marriage.

He seemed to have food for reflection as he stood in the stable door, speculating upon

what attitude he should take up; for the far-reaching consequences of what he had done, and the obligations that he had taken upon himself, had now first come home to him.

His first thought was to pretend to have forgotten the whole incident, and to wait and see what happened, and he consoled himself with saying that perhaps Beauty would do the same.

However, Peter had not quite a clear conscience, and he resolved, on this occasion too, to look Dreadnought up, and lay the matter before him, for in a case like this Dreadnought would be able to speak from experience.

He found his chum with Purple, who was lying outside the kennel, surrounded by a litter of puppies.

‘Yes, they are all my children, and fine ones they are too,’ remarked Dreadnought proudly, as he fell to playing with his babies.

Peter stood quite still and looked silently on at the lively scene, casting the while uncertain side-glances at Purple, who was staring straight in front of her, with an air of wanting to say :

‘Ah, yes, but they are mine most of all.’

A lengthy pause ensued, broken at last

by Dreadnought, who began to extol the delights of family-life, and then went up to Purple and began licking her, whilst Peter sat there staring uncomprehendingly at the ground, with a feeling of being totally superfluous, and cudgelled his brains how he should lead up to his errand.

If there was one thing that Peter at all costs avoided, and dreaded as though for his very life, it was making himself ridiculous ; and he could not rid himself of the thought that both Dreadnought and Purple would laugh at him, when he explained why he had really come.

At last he found courage to remark casually that he had come to the same conclusion himself, and intended to look out for a consort, and at these words Peter turned enquiringly towards Dreadnought.

But Dreadnought did not feel at all convinced that Peter meant it seriously, and it was only when he swore by the memory of The Pretender that it was really his purpose, that Dreadnought counselled him most decidedly against such a step.

‘For,’ he added, ‘although matrimony is certainly a blessed state, and I, for my part, am more than content in it, yet it is not fitted for every one, and least of all for you,

for it signifies a restraint to which you, with your instability, will, in the long run, not submit.'

At these words, however, Peter took offence, for he considered himself to be in possession of all the good qualities that any dog could possess ; and, exclaiming that he would show them that he, too, was fitted for married life, he flew, in a state of great indignation, straight to Beauty.

When Peter caught sight of the beautiful little creature, who ran to meet him with beaming eyes, he reproached himself for all the misgivings which he had so lately entertained ; and he could now imagine nothing more delicious than always to be able to be with Beauty, to whom he vowed inviolable fidelity.

Henceforward they were together daily, and often showed themselves in view of Dreadnought, who began to think he had done Peter an injustice, when he saw the young couple fairly revelling in exultant happiness.

Beauty felt so pleased that she lived more at Peter's home than at her own.

She was made much of by every one, all down to the horses, evincing open delight whenever she paid them a call.

Into every privilege that Peter still enjoyed in undiminished force did she poke her nose, and she was even shown distinct preference in the kitchen.

Secure in all these tokens of her power to captivate, Beauty lifted her shapely little head into the air, and even began to display her superiority towards Peter himself, incessantly informing him that he might be proud to possess a wife like herself, who attracted such general admiration.

But Peter was not quite so delighted, for he understood now that he had warmed a serpent in his bosom, who in the end would oust him from all his rights, and he tried at first to reason with her, and make her understand that arrogance was one of the worst failings a dog could suffer from.

But nothing helped ; Beauty only turned up her nose still more, and when Peter, in his capacity of husband, chastised her for the first time, she responded by snapping at his leg the moment he had turned his back upon her.

But one day when she began to meddle with stable matters, Peter's stock of patience ran out. He chastised her with all due ceremony, and then turned her out of doors, forbidding her his house once for all.

Thus that union was dissolved, and Beauty flew away with a few contemptuous remarks about never having seen such a snub-nosed dog as Peter, who must certainly belong to a common family.

But Peter fretted over the incident and shunned the light of day. He fancied he discovered compassion for him everywhere—even Dreadnought smiled so strangely at him and evidently laid the whole blame on Peter.

It did not help matters either that Peter made excuses, so that at last he even began himself to believe that he had been a little too impatient with Beauty. From that day he avoided society, dissatisfied with every one, with himself, and with life as a whole.

VII

CLICKO was sitting in the verandah, basking in the summer's last rays of sunshine. A flock of small birds had settled in the surrounding trees, and were twittering and singing in her honour; for Clicko needed but to show herself to collect birds about her, so beautiful and attractive was she in their eyes.

But it shall be said to Clicko's credit that all this homage never made her vain, for one of the things she remembered best from her happy days in India was how her grandmother had dinned into her ears that all was not gold that glittered, and that one must be particularly on one's guard against birds with a prepossessing exterior.

True enough, these words were said chiefly with special application to a peacock, who had scratched out the eyes of one of Clicko's sisters; but however that may be, Clicko had laid hold of this maxim and

applied it now to her own case—Heaven knows why, for, compared with these poor little birdlets, she was herself like the peacock in tropical lands.

During the summer she was every morning a silent listener at these concerts, and Clicko looked forward with dread to the time when she could no longer sit outside and enjoy her admirers' choir practices. On this occasion she sat in the verandah longer than usual. She had determined that to-day was the last time she should be out, as it was already far on towards autumn. The sun had not the same warmth as before, and the days were getting so short, and the number of leaves that fell from the trees so unpleasantly large of late.

A gust of wind came and rustled the trees, scattering the leaves over the fields, and Clicko flew, shrieking, into the stable; for she knew very well that she was inclined to be consumptive, and that the least carelessness might have the most fateful consequences.

Summer was over, and autumn weather was slowly beginning to put in its appearance.

'It's right down chilly,' said the old housekeeper, Mrs. Thompson, to herself,

with a shiver, and moved her basket-chair, which she had used as long as Peter could remember, away from the verandah and into the hall.

She called to Peter, who lay napping on the topmost step with his head between his paws. He just lifted his head, but quietly let it fall again, and showed no sign of rising.

‘Well, this *is* a slow hole!’ he thought.

He had not had the least bit of a thing to do all summer. The Master was staying away so unreasonably long this time, too, and Peter’s only available companion was Mrs. Thompson, who sat still in a chair knitting stockings the greater part of the day.

‘A caricature of existence,’ sighed the little fox-terrier, and stretched himself lazily.

No one would have recognised Peter during this period. His little body, which formerly was incapable of keeping still a second, could now lie like a watch-dog, on the same spot for hours at a time without stirring.

A renewed summons from Mrs. Thompson brought him at last to his feet, and after he had stretched his stiff limbs to his

satisfaction, he trotted in to find out what that troublesome lady might want of him.

He was not a little surprised when the dog-cart, with Tom between the shafts, drove up to the side-door.

A series of barks signified his approval of this change in the daily programme.

Then as Tom took the direction of the station, the idea flashed like lightning across Peter's canine brain that it was none other than the Master they were to fetch, and he flew all he knew to be the first to welcome him.

When at last Tom arrived Peter had already been standing on the platform for half an hour, and now told them distractedly that no train had come, and that it must surely all be a mistake.

But the well-dressed groom took little heed of him, and only sat solemnly down to wait, whilst Peter, visibly reassured, also did his best to assume an air of expectation.

After a time the train came puffing up to the platform, and out stepped the Master, right enough, to receive his hearty welcome.

Peter simply did not know what to do with himself. He displayed his joy in genuine dog-fashion by dirtying his master's clothes to the best of his ability, and it was

only when he had taken refuge in the dog-cart, that Peter was necessarily compelled to cease from further demonstrations of affection.

On the way home he flew backwards and forwards, and made the distance thrice as long, abusing Tom all the time for not running quickly enough, although he was trotting along as fast as he knew how to.

In the yard they were received by a pack of fox-hounds, who thronged into the kennel.

Suddenly Peter pricked his ears, for over by the stable door stood the seven hunters, that John had spoken of a little while ago as coming so soon as the hunting season set in.

‘Now at last we’re in sight of the season,’ he thought, and darted off to examine at closer quarters the new arrivals that were entrusted to his charge.

A black gelding found him too inquisitive, and lashed out viciously, but Peter only made as if he did not see it. He did not consider it good policy to undertake a correction in sight of everybody, for, after all, he was not acquainted with the new-comer yet, and did not know what sort of treatment the case called for.

Peter only withdrew slowly, whilst the interested air he had assumed a little while ago gave place to a worried, reflective expression as he thought of all the difficulties which he was now again to have with the new horses, before they submitted to his authority with a good grace.

But as he went up to Dreadnought, who had been a witness to the whole occurrence, he swore that the black should in due time have reason to regret his impertinence.

In the meantime the Master came over the courtyard with a friend from town, and they went into the stables to look more closely at the new horses, whom Dreadnought and Peter also subjected to a severe criticism.

But Clicko the cockatoo sat huddled up in a corner over the mouse-grey polo-pony, and shivered with cold. She dreaded the cold autumn and winter days, for hunting conjured up for her nothing but visions of influenza and an insane terror of galloping consumption.

Peter, on the contrary, was in the best of spirits now, as he ran about greeting all and every one—for the old, happy days had begun again.

And so it happened that both dogs were,

a little later, invited for a short stay in the Master's favourite room, which lay in a line with the stables, and where Peter liked so well to be.

They were some of his happiest moments, when he could lie in front of the fire in this room, which was fitted up half as a smoking-room, half as a harness-room.

The walls were covered with pictures of celebrated horses, for the most part photographic reproductions and old oil-colours. There hung Eclipse and The Flying Dutchman and all the rest of them.

Hello! there was actually a new picture of Signorinetta, winner of the Derby and the Oaks.

A large photograph of Dreadnought hung there too, as Peter with great eagerness showed him, for it was the first time Dreadnought had been in there, poor fellow.

'An hour like this in the evening with a cigar is a wonderful institution, particularly when you come home tired after a day's hunting,' he heard the Master say to his friend, who lay like himself outstretched in an easy-chair, smoking a cigarette.

'Yes, it gives one a very comfortable feeling,' the other agreed, with a nod.

‘And having animals with you makes it all the pleasanter—gives you such a feeling of security ; just look at this head,’ pursued the Master, and patted Dreadnought on the forehead. ‘Did you ever see anything more faithful and sincere?—a living type that gives expression to the gravity and directness of the whole character.’

‘Take Peter again—look at him. Don’t you find just the same expressed there, only in quite a different way?’

‘Yes, it is so,’ he added with emphasis ; ‘if one wants to find incorruptible fidelity one must go to animals—to some little chap like this,’ he concluded, and stroked Peter down the back.

‘Yes, I believe you’re right,’ answered the other slowly ; ‘I have had the same experience.’

PART II
OUTCASTS

The instinct for self-preservation which defies all laws of morality can only be subdued by the divine element, which lives eternal.

I

LATE one March evening a raging storm passed over the place where our friends lived.

It thundered and lightened. The rain fell in torrents, and the wind rushed howling through the great woods. Many a hoary giant must bow the knee that night before its power, and the young trees, which had not yet essayed life's storms, were bent hither and thither like reeds to the earth. The birds flew shrieking through the air, and were borne helplessly away before the storm, whilst the creatures of the field buried themselves deeper down in their holes.

‘Lord, what villainous weather!’ sighed a lonely vixen, who was roaming about in the dark wood, seeking for a home.

She, too, had felt Nature's call and sought a helpmate, but she had had no home to offer, no earth that could afford them shelter

against storm and cold, and so she had been faithlessly deserted.

The vixen, indeed, had never had any place she could call her own, for she was still in her raw youth, and the few times she had found a convenient earth she had been ousted by stronger foxes.

A home she must have, and that at once—at once, by Heaven! screamed the vixen aloud in desperation, and was at her wits' end.

In her feverish hunt she had even come quite close to the big house, and her hoarse, uncanny screech wakened its inmates, who lay in their warm beds.

Suddenly a flash clove the air, and an old oak fell with a crash to the earth.

But this proved the wandering fox's salvation, for the mighty root was torn up out of the ground and offered a capital shelter.

'Here will I build my home,' she thought, and, creeping in under the root, she laid herself down to rest.

When daylight next morning fell into the hole, she had brought a litter of cubs into the world.

A happy feeling thrilled through Mother Fox as she gave her little ones to drink,



She had brought a litter of cubs into the world.



though she had but little to give, for she had tasted neither meat nor drink for several days.

So Mother Fox resolved to go on the prowl. . . . To feed her young she must first have food herself, though she did not like hunting by daylight. But when she put her nose outside the hole she discovered that human beings lived in the neighbourhood, and drew back into the darkness of the earth.

However, hunger and the cries of her young drove her forth from her safe retreat, and she slunk cautiously off, only to find that the hounds had their quarters here too.

The vixen was first terror-stricken, and stood a moment as though rooted to the ground, but then she came to remember how, in her own childhood's days, the hounds had hunted the whole fox-family from their home, and her eyes blazed at the recollection of it with hatred and exasperation.

Yes, she would take up the battle for life, she snarled, so that her pointed teeth flashed in the sunlight—the weather had turned fine again after the stormy night, and the sun shone warmly from the blue sky.

So furious was Mother Fox that she had clean forgotten why she had come forth into the light of day, and only when her cunning gaze discovered that the poultry-yard, was not far off did she remember her cubs, which lay at home crying.

So on she stole, ready to offer up her life in the struggle for existence.

A fat Brahmaputra, who was just performing her morning toilet, fell her first victim, and died without a gasp. Such quick work did she make of it that even the cock suspected nothing. It was not until late in the evening, when the hens were gone to roost, that little Molly, who counted up all the rows of fowls every night, noticed that a hen was missing, and a tramp, who had been seen in the neighbourhood of the house, was reported for it.

But that night Mother Fox lay well content outside her earth, and looked up at the starlit heavens, where the moon cast her pale beam through the tree-tops, and she felt herself a happy fox.

How good it was to be alive, after all, she thought, and stretched herself in happy repletion.

II

ALTHOUGH the fox-family's lair lay not far from the house it was not discovered, for nobody dreamed that a fox would be so stupid as to choose an earth in such immediate proximity to inhabited parts.

Mother Fox understood this, and so kept herself concealed during the daytime, venturing forth only in the grey of dawn and late in the evening.

Her principal aid upon these raids of hers was a river that flowed smoothly and quietly past the fowl-yard. A nocturnal observer might have seen how Mother Fox swam long stretches up the river, before venturing ashore on one of the banks, to make certain of leaving no trail behind her.

In this way the fox-family kept the game going a long, long time, and no one could understand who the thief could be.

Cub-hunting had long since been begun, for October was drawing to a close. The

young foxes were growing big and strong, and would soon be ready to leave the earth. A good education they got too.

One by one Mother Fox took them with her on her expeditions, and taught them how to turn to account the cunning which nature had lavished upon them, and how they were to kill.

‘Remember that one always comes farthest with cunning in this world, for we have no friends, and every one is striving after our lives,’ she admonished her young.

‘There live your worst enemies,’ said the vixen one day to her children, and looked towards the kennels. ‘The hounds will sooner or later take your lives just as surely as they will one day take mine,’ she concluded, and looked at her young, who, at these words, drew back into the darkness of the earth, where they remained for the rest of the day, terrified out of their senses at what they had just heard.

But Mother Fox followed them, and said in a voice that was hoarse with suppressed rage :

‘Remember that you will yourselves be killed, so kill where you may, for life is nothing else but a struggle to live.’

And all the young foxes promised in

scared voices to kill as much as possible, whilst pure terror brought their young hearts into their mouths.

However, they soon reconciled themselves to the thought that their mission in life was to murder and see blood, and Heaven knows they acted up to their mother's injunctions ; for they now inaugurated such a reign of violence in the poultry-yard that they were not even capable of devouring all the hens they killed.

They carried on their murdering at last as a sport, and there was no bound to their audaciousness.

A night-watch was set both of dogs and of men, but all to no purpose.

Peter, who really had no great affection for hens and ducks, had been compelled to spend several nights in the fowl-yard, instead of in the stables, and was most indignant about it.

'I don't think we shall catch the thief that way,' he said one morning to Dreadnought, who endorsed his opinion ; and the two friends now began to discuss ways and means of putting a stopper on these tiresome pilferings, but they could hit upon no plan. Then Peter came to think of the cockatoo, Clicko, and although he did not care about

asking other animals for advice, he went to the stables, accompanied by Dreadnought, to take Clicko's opinion on the case in question.

But Clicko was nowhere to be seen in the stables, and Dreadnought, for the first time, intimated to Peter that in view of the peculiar circumstances he had no objection to his accompanying him into the kennels.

Quite right ; here sat Clicko buried in the straw, in the middle of the mob of hounds, so that only her head with its curved beak and her blinking little eyes were visible.

After Dreadnought had gone over all the details and the object of their visit, Clicko began to speak, and said, screwing up her right eye and laying her head on one side, that she could not perceive that an intervention on her part could serve any purpose ; for one thing was certain, and that was, that here only a fox could be at work, whether in animal or human shape, and that hounds were obviously the people to deal with the matter.

With these words Clicko dipped deep down into the straw, and the last thing she said was that she had made it a principle never to interfere in other people's business,

and this was a sound maxim which she intended to follow to the end.

At these sensible words, which precluded all further discussion, Peter and Dreadnought sat still and looked at each other, and then slunk, crest-fallen, into the stables, where they fell to racking their brains anew.

At last they came to the conclusion that Peter should lie on watch in the wood.

And so Peter, of his own free will, spent a cold night under the open sky, with the first hesitating snow-flakes of the winter dripping upon his nose, but came swearing into the stables next morning with a bad cold, and without any news to tell. He understood now that there must be some one at work who was more knowing than dogs—it must surely be a human being, he thought.

From that day Peter regarded all human beings who did not belong to the people of the house with distinct suspicion—a thing which he had never done formerly.

But one evening, when Peter did not know how to make the time go, he lounged to the edge of the wood and began rummaging about, chiefly because he had not been there for such a long time. He had no idea that the great oak had been

splintered before he saw its mighty roots pointing skywards, and, of course, he had to investigate things !

In a moment he was under the root, and here he saw something that made his heart beat.

He saw Mother Fox with a hen in her mouth, surrounded by all her young ones, who were sharing the dainty repast with her.

And instead of thinking over what he had seen, as any circumspect dog would have done, Peter rushed furiously forward and tried to snatch the stolen fowl from the large family.

It was only by the skin of his teeth that Peter escaped with his life, for Mother Fox hurled herself over him. She even pursued him, and it was only the sight of the dread-inspiring kennels that saved his life that time.

But Mother Fox said to her children : ' We must fly from here, for, as surely as we are alive now, to-morrow we shall have a visit from more than a hundred hounds ; ' and she fled from that lovely earth at the head of her family, with bitterness in her heart, taking the sorry remains of the murdered fowl with her.

III

WHEN Mother Fox deserted her home, she ran down to the river, which, as you know, had always been her faithful helper, and took refuge in it also on this occasion, followed by all her cubs.

The vixen swam so long that her young could scarcely keep afloat any longer, and then, going ashore, took the path towards the moorland heights.

‘You must know,’ she said to her children, who were lagging behind her, wearied by the long flight, ‘that the only safe place for us now is the moorland, where the horses cannot pass.’

And she sought out a place where the hillside fell steeply outwards, and where rocks and precipitous hills blocked the way for men and animals. Here she thought herself in safety and laid herself down to rest.

But when hunger appeared and the

whole family cried for food, Mother Fox was at her wits' end, for in these impassable regions existed no game for her to kill, only rock and fell and scanty earth.

Then said she to her young that they had long since reached the age at which a mother's duty to support them ceased, and that they must now go out into the wide world and provide their own means of subsistence.

At this speech the young foxes fell silent, and looked at each other without uttering a word.

Mother Fox saw her children's despair, and bitterly it pained her, for even foxes have mothers' hearts, with as much tenderness in them as those of other animals.

So she said, gazing out over the valley, where the buildings of the Manor were just visible in the dusk of evening, that she did not wish any of them to leave the home hungry, and she would therefore prepare for them an evening meal more delicious than they had ever yet tasted.

'But—it will also be the last one,' she added gravely, and enjoined them to hold themselves in quietness till she came back.

When she had gone a little way she

turned back, as she came to think of something she had forgotten to say.

And she said to her cubs, who listened to her words with horror, that it might even come to pass that she would never come home any more.

‘For down there, I suppose, both human beings and animals are lying in wait for me ;’ and she peered in the direction of the poultry-yard, which was now visible only to the eye of a fox, so far was the gloom of evening advanced.

With these words Mother Fox vanished, just as desperate as she was that spring morning when she bagged her hen for the first time, and brought it to the earth where she had given birth to her children.

Darkness fell closer and closer, and at last she could find the way only by the smell that the poultry-yard diffused to a wide radius.

By and by she came to the edge of the wood and sought out the fallen oak, where she had lived so many happy days, and she remained standing there a while, lost in her own meditations. . . .

It was night, and the hens had long since gone to roost in the safe hen-house, whose door little Molly had carefully closed.

But of this Mother Fox could know nothing, so she laid herself down on the watch to wait for the break of early morning.

Many, many hours did she lie crouching like this, waiting for her opportunity.

Hazy dawn broke forth over the hill-tops and spread down into the vale, where everything still reposed in the quietness of night.

She heard the hens cackle and the cocks crow, and only wondered that none were yet to be seen.

At last she observed little Molly, who was always an early bird, go across the yard and open wide the door of the fowl-house, whilst all the fowls poured out.

None of the hens, however, ventured out of the run ; they were frightened out of their wits at all the murdering that had taken place among them.

Mother Fox lay still and ground her teeth with hunger and mortification, regarding the while the tempting scene of animation which unrolled itself before her. At last a flock of chickens tripped out of the door, but darted instantaneously back again, for Mother Hen was cackling after them in a fright. Only one sorry little thing ran in

its flurry the wrong way, and, as ill-luck would have it, took just the path to the duck-pond, where Mother Fox lay waiting for it.

‘A scraggy chicken is nothing for a hungry family, hardly enough for myself,’ thought the vixen, as she flew disappointedly off with her sorry prey ; and she decided not to go home again at all, for she did not know the difference between good and evil.

Mother Fox took the road southward, and was glad that she was rid at last of her troublesome cubs, and that in a way that not only justified her in her own eyes, but even satisfied her vanity, for she considered she had done something smart and cunning.

Mother Fox now lived for herself, and flourished exceedingly.

The hounds often came upon her scent, and she gave them many a good run, but as she knew all the hiding-places to be found within a radius of many miles, she had, at a pinch, always successfully avoided her pursuers.

The vixen did not so easily forget old haunts, for she still lifted an odd hen or so there, though she very seldom ventured that way now that she had once been found out.

But Mother Fox kept the game going at

long intervals, and it was this that proved her bane,—for at last Peter and Dreadnought really discovered her, and killed her after a desperate struggle.

The fox's mask was stuffed and hung over the door that led into the kennels, although Peter considered this unfair, and vainly suggested a place on the end-wall in the stables, for Dreadnought could have enjoyed looking through the railings at it just as well there.

Dreadnought would often stand for long periods gazing at the stuffed mask, which glared out over the hounds, still preserving in its eyes the expression of hatred it had worn that early morning when Mother Fox discovered the hounds in the neighbourhood of her home.

It was a long time before Dreadnought had taken his fill of looking at his fallen enemy's pate, and he always turned away from it with the words that foxes were knowing—that could not be denied—but hounds were still more knowing, and all his mates howled in assent to Dreadnought's words.

IV

For several days the young foxes lay still at the place where their mother had deserted them, but they grew tired at last of waiting for Mother Fox to come back with food, and hunger drove them down one by one into the valley.

Then they understood that the struggle for existence was hard, bitterly hard.

At last there was but one cub left, and that was the least and weakest of them all, for he had been the last one to come into the world. He was distinguished from his brothers and sisters not only by being the smallest, but by also having a mark that none of the others had, namely, a white spot on one ear. Of course he had besides the white tuft on his tail that foxes have. He had been his mother's darling, for motherly love was just what he needed, being the youngest, pushed and shoved about as he was by all his brothers and sisters who were stronger.

Starvation almost tortured the life out of the young fox, and at last he, too, grew tired of waiting, and early one autumn morning found his way to lower regions.

Mist lay like an impenetrable veil over the hill-tops. It was one of those dark and dismal autumn mornings that are the immediate forerunners of winter. The sun had already long since begun his day's work, but, weary with all his efforts during the summer, he had not the strength to pierce through the heavy rain-clouds that overhung the landscape. There was no wind, and a gentle drizzle was beginning to fall.

When the fox had walked a long, long way—in reality it was not so far, but it seemed such an endless distance, for he was exhausted with hunger—he saw some small animal run down into a ditch. The fox sneaked after it, making himself as little as possible, not to be seen, in the hope that it was something to stalk.

His brown fur blended with the high grass and leaves, that bore autumn's sad colours, and he slunk cautiously forward with wide-gaping eyes that were black with desire and famine.

It was the first time the young fox was

out hunting on his own responsibility, but, as he lay there crouched and waiting for his chance to strike home, he was, nevertheless, a perfect picture of slyness and cunning.

With a spring he hurled himself upon his victim ; but the little animal lay quite still, whilst the fox started back, bleeding and yelping with pain. He had never seen such a strange animal before ! As it lay there curled up in a ball it bore not the least trace of resemblance to the animal that, but a moment since, ran so lightly down into the ditch.

It was, in fact, an old hedgehog, who was out so early in the morning to hunt for his breakfast, that the fox had come upon.

After a while the hedgehog suddenly ran quickly out of the ditch again, and made off faster than one would have thought a hedgehog could do, and the fox, firmly believing it was another and quite ordinary animal, threw himself upon it once more, but again bounded back, hopping and dancing across the fields with pain, so badly had the hedgehog's sharp quills hurt him.

But the little animal lay there quite still, curled up, for a long, long time, before he ventured to stir again.

In a pitiably mauled condition the fox

regarded the strange thing that had caused him so much pain, and did not know what to make of it at all ; for he was still in his callow youth, and consequently did not know that the only way for a fox to kill a hedgehog is to get it turned over on its back.

So he went slinking along on his way, whilst the hedgehog lay as still as though there were no life in him. But at last he, too, started moving, and continued upon his way, hunting for food for his breakfast.

As the fox jogged away down the hill-side, it came home to him more and more clearly that he was now thrown quite upon his own resources, and had none but himself to rely upon in the wide, wide world.

It was true, after all, as his mother had said that evening when she left them to go on the prowl, that everybody was his enemy, that a fox will never find a moment's rest, hunted as he is both by men and by animals.

By this time the fox had come so far that he could look down over the dale. The sun had now gained greater strength, and was busy dispersing the last remnants of the autumn mist that were vanishing over the hill-tops. His pale beams cast their gleam over the yellowed fields, whence autumn's bounty had been long since safely

gathered in. Down in the valley the fox saw houses and farms, saw men and women engaged in the day's work, and heard the clamouring of hounds from the kennels.

Shortly he caught sight of a flock of crows that had settled upon a refuse-heap out on a meadow, and the fox laid his course in that direction ; but long before he had come sufficiently near an old grandfather of a crow discovered him, and the whole flock disappeared, cawing hoarsely, over the fields.

At this the fox did not know what to do in his need, for hunger was tormenting him unbearably, and he laid himself down, desperate with exhaustion. In a little time, however, he rose and slunk to the refuse-heap where the crows had gathered, hoping he might perhaps find upon it something to still his hunger ; but birds of the crow-family are notorious gluttons, and nothing was left behind that bore the slightest resemblance to anything devourable—the crows had taken it all.

In dumb despair the fox stood still and reflected, for death was the only thing left, he thought—there was no way out of it !

He was still so young and wanted so to live, and he clung to life with all the natural tenacity peculiar to foxes.

In his extremity he began to scream—hoarse screams full of despair, screams such as animals, without knowing it, will emit when they feel the coming of death.

But the fox's despairing screams attracted no attention as they rang out over the fields and hills, which repeated them and passed them on to the great woods, where they died away in the silence of solitude.

There were, however, some who heard the poor fox's cry of distress, and these were the crows. They knew by experience that animals scream like this only when they are about to die, and they flocked nearer with their marshal, the old Gaffer Crow, who was great-grandfather to the whole assembly. All chattering at once, the flock formed a ring about Reynard, who already lay with closed eyes, apparently without life.

'He is not dead yet,' said Gaffer Crow warningly to some young crows, who could not conceal their impatience.

'Foxes are the most knowing and the most cunning of all animals, and perhaps he is only making-believe to sleep. Let us wait, for the day is before us,' ran his words of admonition.

And the crows waited one hour, and they



They waited one hour—they waited two hours.



waited two hours, and, as time went on, more and more crows came up. . . .

It was already far on into the third hour, and the crows' impatience was becoming great, as they flapped screaming around their prey. Now and again a crow would even slap him with his wings as he flew past, to convince himself that the dainty meal would soon be ready, and the chattering circle round the exhausted fox came closer and closer.

But a recreating sleep had fallen upon the fox, bringing life and relief from all weariness—true enough, the sleep that but for a moment causes the flame of life to flare up, before it is extinguished for ever and borne away in Death's black arms into the gloom of eternity.

The fox was not dead yet, but his senses were far away from things of earth, and he felt no more agony. His thoughts worked clearly, and he saw all his life pass before him in vivid images, as human beings also will when body and soul are in process of dissolution.

His happy childhood's days under the oak-root, the wild flight from the home, and that evening when the mother had deserted them, stood distinctly before him,

and he seemed now to pass through all his joys and sufferings anew.

At the recollection of the privations of the last few days a spasm or two shot through the fox, and he began to wail so bitterly that it might have touched the hearts even of obscene birds.

‘He has now reached his last moments,’ chattered Gaffer Crow, breaking the horrid silence, for during these moments there was not a crow that opened his beak; they only closed up tighter and tighter around their prey in dumb desire.

‘The eyes fall to me!’ screamed Gaffer Crow suddenly, and flapped up on to the fox’s head, where he squatted to carry out his purpose.

This was the signal for a general set-to, and all the crows vied with each other in screaming, till there arose such a din that even the dead might have returned to life, and the fox, in whom life was not yet extinct, came back in terror to realities.

With a jump he was on his feet, and hurled himself, in his death-struggle, into the midst of the flock of crows, clawing and biting wildly about him.

All the fox’s slumbering vitality came back at this moment, as he fought for his life.

He felt that he had laid hold of a crow, which flapped and squawked, though he could see nothing, so full was the air of crows around him on all sides.

It was of Gaffer Crow, in fact—who, in horror at seeing the fox all alive, had clean forgotten the art of flying—that he had thus caught hold.

But when the mob saw their marshal in the fox's clutches, they all with one accord hurled themselves upon him, and pecked and flapped at the fox till, in his confusion, he let go the hold he had on Gaffer Crow.

A pile of miserable feathers was the only trace of the desperate struggle that had taken place. But Gaffer Crow must, nevertheless, have fared badly. He could not manage to fly at all, but turned a few pitiful cart-wheels, for one of his wings had been broken in the heat of battle.

At last the whole flock of crows formed a circle about him, and, with two of the strongest crows supporting him in his flight, they vanished, screaming their hoarse screams which had torn the fox from death's hideous embrace.

It was already late in the afternoon, and darkness was coming on.

Without knowing whither, the fox slunk

away over the fields, and began to gnaw grass off the ground, whilst he slaked his thirst at the river that flowed past the Manor House.

The fox had now, in fact, come right down to inhabited parts, and here he scented the neighbourhood of the fowl-yard, for his senses had returned to him with renewed vigour, in consequence of the excitement he had lately been subjected to.

But here the poor fox suffered a fresh disappointment, for when night fell he was still sneaking round the hen-run, without having had an opportunity to satisfy his insane hunger.

At last he tumbled over, exhausted, outside the little door that led to the hen-house, and from that moment the young fox could remember nothing more. . . .

But the autumn night, which came on with storm and rain, cleared up by and by.

The moon peeped out pale and frightened from behind the clouds, and at last came starlight and a ground-frost.

V

EARLY the following morning little Molly came tripping over the courtyard towards the hen-house, to feed the hens.

This was a task that was entrusted to her, and which she performed with pleasure and fidelity, for little Molly had not failed to get up a single morning, though it often seemed hard to leave her warm bed.

In one hand she held a little bunch of keys—the door to the hen-house was now always locked at night—and in the other she carried a bucket of hen-food.

The cold that set in during the night had increased towards morning, and Molly shivered as she came running across the yard.

But suddenly she came to a stop, for she caught sight of the fox, who was still lying on the same spot where he had sunk down with exhaustion the preceding day.

‘A fox that has died of cold,’ thought Molly first, and went bravely nearer,

although in her heart of hearts she was a little uneasy, for she was but a little maid, who had just begun to go to school.

‘And it’s not grown up either,’ she said to herself, as she sat down on the step; and now Molly really began to feel a little compassion for him, although she understood so well that the fox had had it in his heart to kill her hens.

At last she even began to pat him, and now felt quite convinced that he had already long been dead, for the rime had formed in his coat. And she continued to stroke his fur, which seemed to her so nice and soft and warm.

Then a strange thing happened—the fox actually opened his eyes, for there was still a spark of life in him, and perhaps it was due to little Molly’s stroking and patting his fur that the spark again flickered up.

However, the fox was so nerveless and exhausted that he could not rise. He even closed his eyes again, and seemed to relapse into a state of drowsiness once more.

But the little girl had seen the fox’s glance, and she now ran into the kitchen to tell her great news and fetch help. Here she met John, the head-groom, who was just in the act of drinking his morning cup

of tea before going into the stables, and a number of maids, who had already been up a long time.

‘Yes, it’s alive too!’ affirmed Molly, pulling at John’s sleeve; ‘come and see for yourself!—and besides, it lies so still and quiet!’ she said finally, beginning to cry softly, for Molly had an unusually soft heart for all that suffered.

And John, who had assumed a very sceptical attitude towards Molly’s wonderful adventure, was at last persuaded to leave his smoking tea-cup and run to the hen-house, accompanied by the little girl and all the maid-servants.

‘Bust me, if the little lass wasn’t right!’ exclaimed John in astonishment, and buried both his hands in his trouser-pockets, which with him was always a sure sign of emotion.

‘There’s life in him too,’ he confirmed, taking Reynard by the scruff of the neck and lifting him up.

However, there was no one who knew quite what they were to do with the fox, and John suggested at last that he had best take the little life there was left in him.

But, at that, little Molly began to weep bitterly and beg for the fox—after all, he

had done no harm and not taken any of her hens ; he was too little and wretched for that, poor thing. And she gave John no peace until he had carried the fox into the kitchen, and even told her she was a good little lass.

When the fox came into the warmth he began to revive, and little by little his senses returned. A great curiosity overmastered him at these strange surroundings, in which he felt so cosy and warm and comfortable, and was given such delicious food as he had never tasted before.

‘Yes, it really is bonny as it lies there, funny little thing,’ said Mrs. Thompson, the housekeeper, and stooped to pat his brown fur.

‘And look what a funny white spot it has on one ear,’ she added, as she continued to pat the fox, and they all now wondered at the white spot, which even John could not remember having seen on any fox before.

So it fell quite naturally for the fox to be called ‘White-ear,’ and it was none other than little Molly who suggested the name, which met with general approval, for they all thought it was a pretty name. And from that day the fox was never called anything

but White-ear : even all the animals on the estate, with whom he became acquainted later, always called him that.

White-ear soon regained his strength, and flourished in his new surroundings and became every one's pet—but little Molly was especially fond of him.

She nursed him and tended him the whole day, and with her own hands made him a bed in a basket, which she had placed in the same room as she slept in herself.

The young fox had hitherto fared excellently, comparatively speaking, for he had confined himself exclusively to the kitchen and Molly's room.

But this could not be kept up in the long run. The hounds were bound to discover some time that there was a fox living at the Manor, and of what would happen then the little girl dared not even think.

And so it was one morning that Peter and Dreadnought stood outside the kitchen door and poked their noses into the air, for they had really discovered something suspicious.

'I bet there's something queer here !' said Peter, whimpering with excitement, as he pressed his nose into the chink of the

door. Dreadnought performed precisely the same experiment, with the result that he declared with astonishment that there could be no mistake—a fox there must be somewhere or other ; whereupon they both fell to barking like furies.

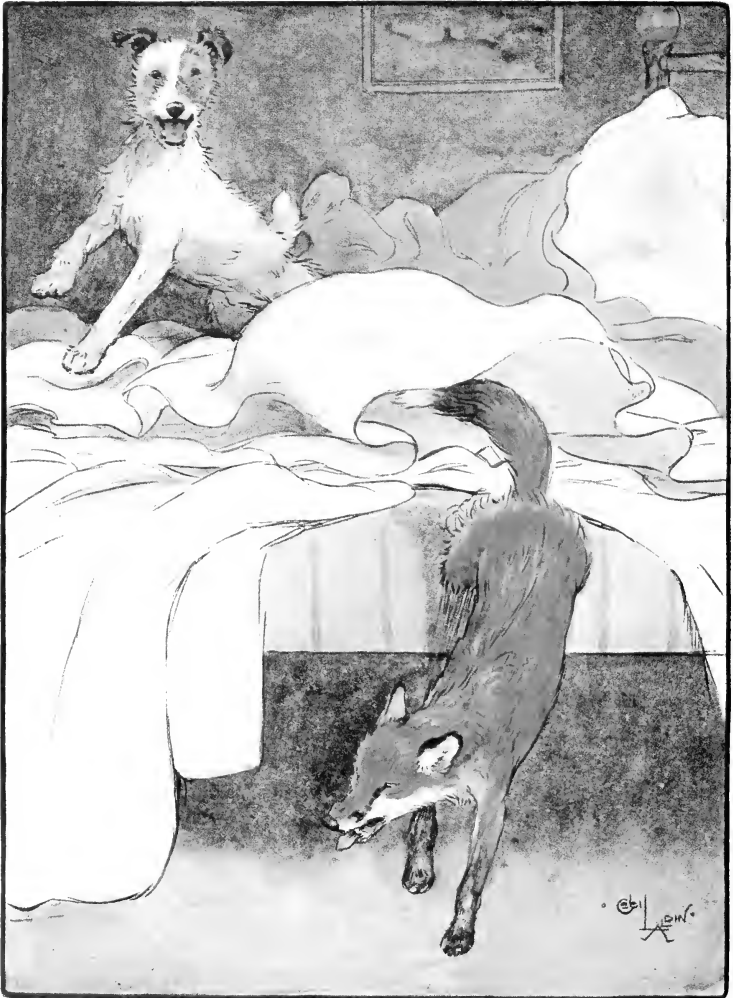
But in Molly's bedroom White-ear started up out of his sleep, and was seized with an indefinable dread, for he understood that the dogs' fury concerned just him.

In his strait he could think of nothing else to do but seek refuge with Molly, who had also been wakened by Dreadnought and Peter, so White-ear jumped up to her in bed and hid himself under the quilt.

But when cook opened the kitchen door just the least crack, to chase them away, Peter wriggled in a flash through the opening and rushed furiously into the kitchen ; whilst Dreadnought, on the contrary, got a nip on the nose that he remembered long afterwards, for Lizzie, the cook, was a strong-minded woman, who was not to be daunted so easily.

There now commenced such a racket in the kitchen as might have frightened the life out of more than one fox.

Peter ran amuck, and Lizzie was not much better in her struggles to lay hold of



Molly's bed now became a scene of wild confusion.

the disturber of order, who was turning the whole kitchen upside-down like this.

There was nothing that raised Lizzie's ire more than when some one trespassed on her preserves, over which she had now reigned in absolute supremacy for nearly a generation.

As ill-luck would have it, the door to Molly's bedroom was standing ajar, and, before Lizzie could turn round to shut it, Peter was already on Molly's bed, which now became a scene of wild confusion.

Molly screamed, and the fox screamed and bit, whilst Peter, to the best of his ability, contributed his quota to the uproar.

There is no saying what the upshot of it all would have been, had not Lizzie's powerful fist laid hold of Peter by the scruff of the neck. She now lifted him, kicking and sprawling, off the bed, and threw him remorselessly out of the window ; and Peter could thank his stars that Molly's room was on the ground floor, for Lizzie would not have thought twice before throwing him out of the window even if it had been at the top of the house, so wroth and indignant was she at the moment.

The news of Peter's adventure flashed

like wildfire over the whole kennel and stable.

The hounds assumed an attitude of complete incredulity towards the assertion that a fox had its quarters in the kitchen, where it lived on a footing of peaceful good terms.

All the horses shook their heads, and did not quite know what to believe; but Clicko the cockatoo was the only animal that gave credence to Peter's story. She said, as she sat down on the little mouse-grey polo-pony's back, that she had a dim recollection from her childhood's days in India, of its often happening that human beings adopted little wild animals and nursed and tended them—it was not at all unusual for even little lion and tiger children to be brought up among human beings in this way. And the little pony shook his head uncomprehendingly.

He had never heard such strange talk before.

He knew that Clicko was a wise bird; but, all the same, he decided that what she had now told him sounded very queer, and at last he, too, did not know what to believe.

In the kennels Peter's adventure was first

credited when Dreadnought swore by his nose that there really was a fox at the Manor—for all the hounds knew Dreadnought's fine nose, which had smelt out so many a fox, when the rest of the hounds were about to give up in desperation all hope of a scent.

But in the stables there was no one who believed the story until they saw little White-ear for themselves one day, and then he was reposing in the arms of John.

Molly had begged and worried him so long that he had had to promise to introduce White-ear in this way to all the other animals at the Manor.

And now a special visit was paid in every box and stall, where White-ear's appearance called forth general wonderment, whilst all the horses snuffed at him, and in this manner made his acquaintance.

The last horse of all to be introduced to White-ear was the little mouse-grey pony, and he was so astonished at his new acquaintance that he snorted and reared until White-ear got quite afraid. Clicko, who happened just then to be seated on his back, flew up on the window-sill, screeching all the time that she had no desire to form new acquaintances, for one only incurred

obligations by so doing. With these words she retired completely into herself and looked as though she was mortally offended, whilst all the little birds fluttered round her in a panic.

‘Yes, that’ll be a hard job,’ said John reflectively to himself, as, with White-ear on his arm, he went towards Peter, who was standing in the yard, and John now held White-ear on a level with his shoulder.

As soon as Peter set eyes on them he rushed furiously towards John, and jumped up at the fox to lay hold of him and pay him back the grudge he owed him.

It made but little difference, however much John wheedled him. It only seemed to irritate Peter still more, and at last John had to carry White-ear, who was shaking with terror, back into the kitchen.

But John, who was a Yorkshireman by birth, did not give a thing up after one try. On the contrary, he was one of those persons whose purpose becomes only the more fixed the greater the difficulties, and he had now made up his mind once for all, that, even if Peter and White-ear could not become friends, they should at any rate learn to tolerate each other.

He repeated the same experiment day

out and day in, with the imperturbable fixity of purpose peculiar to him, and Peter at last accustomed himself to this comedy, and White-ear did the same, no longer shivering when he sat on John's arm and Peter jumped barking up towards him.

As the days and weeks passed by Peter grew more reconciled to White-ear, and began at length to find the fox comical, being particularly struck by his white ear, which he had never seen any fox with before.

'It must be a queer animal,' thought Peter, and a great curiosity overmastered him, until at last his approaches diminished in fury and became characterised by a greater inquisitiveness.

'No—foxes have only a white tuft on their tails ;' and Dreadnought agreed with him that perhaps it was not a real proper fox.

And so it came about that he was called White-ear by the animals as well.

At last Peter really began to believe that it could not be a proper fox at all, but some other strange creature, which the people at the Manor had taken under their care out of pure compassion, and in this he found an excuse for tolerating its presence.

Now, in course of time, the fox had grown big and strong, and was not to be played with. Many a time, when Peter was too forward, had he been made to feel his teeth and nails, and at the bottom of his heart he entertained a certain respect for White-ear.

In this way there developed, as it were of itself, a kind of armed neutrality between them.

The first sign of this appeared one day when White-ear was sitting in John's lap, for between these two a firm friendship had arisen, and there he remained sitting whilst Peter stood and looked at him.

Little by little Peter came nearer and nearer with every manifestation of uncertainty, for he did not quite know what attitude to adopt. But White-ear lay quite still, with up-pricked ears, and looked quietly at him, as though, with his big brown eyes, he would invite Peter to form a closer acquaintance. And Peter also evinced every sign of interest, as he sniffed at White-ear's tail, whimpering gently the while with excitement and curiosity, as dogs do when anything takes possession of their minds to the exclusion of all else.

Then Peter sniffed at his back, and finally

at the white spot on his ear, whilst White-ear lay still, so still all the time, and suffered himself to be sniffed at. In his heart of hearts he was a little uneasy, but he felt secure with John.

It came about then that Peter and White-ear agreed to put up with each other, to the joy of every one and to the pride of John, who thus saw his persevering labours crowned with success.

White-ear now began to walk about a bit on his own account, and paid short visits to the stables, where he soon became familiar with the horses.

But it was not every day he could go about alone like this. Dreadnought had not yet made any closer acquaintance with him, for John had at once recognised that efforts in that direction would fail.

Now, as Dreadnought was accustomed to go out at his own sweet will, while the other hounds were shut up in the kennels, it was decided that his rights in this respect must be curtailed a little out of consideration for White-ear.

So good care was taken that Dreadnought was always in when White-ear was out of the kitchen.

Of late Dreadnought had distinctly

observed that the encroachments made on his freedom in this way were becoming greater and greater, and the intelligent fox-hound well understood the reason for it. So a mighty hatred against White-ear flamed up in him, and he swore a bloody vengeance.

The first time he set eyes on White-ear was one Monday morning in the stables.

White-ear, who had developed into a beautiful specimen of the fox family—for, thank goodness! there was no lack of courage here—came walking quietly and peaceably across the stable passage. But Dreadnought, who was standing in the outer yard of the kennels, whence he had a view over the whole stables, caught sight of him, and rushed with indomitable fury against the iron railings which divided the home of the hounds from the horses' quarters.

It was a good thing the bars were of iron; had they been of wood they would have been splintered like match-sticks, so violently did the great fox-hound hurl himself against them. So wild with rage was Dreadnought on this occasion that no hound could recall ever having seen him so implacable.

The whole kennel, old and young hounds

alike, now reinforced him in wild fury, and there arose a howl in unison so dread-inspiring that all the horses began to quake with terror and lash out, while Clicko the cockatoo flew screeching and flapping about in the window-sills, trying to get out, in perfect transports of fright.

But White-ear ran into the kitchen, where he hid himself under a dresser, and stayed there for several days before venturing out again.

From that day White-ear's visits in the stables became more rare, for he acquired on that occasion a nameless dread of hounds.

This dread he retained afterwards throughout the greater part of his long and arduous life.

VI

‘YES, you are perfectly right,’ said Clicko, one hazy autumn morning, to Peter, ‘this state of affairs is intolerable.’ And with that she drew right back into the corner of the window, through which the breaking day came in and cast its dull light over the long rows of horses that stood sleeping.

Peter sat reverently listening to Clicko’s words, and did not in the least know what to say, for, Heaven knew, it was unbearable with this fox in the house, but the great question was how he was to be got rid of, and it was this that Peter had now come to ask Clicko about.

The aged bird seemed to have divined Peter’s thought, for she went on to say that one day there would be a catastrophe, and at these words Clicko tapped her beak against the pane, as though to give them more emphasis, and began to lament that

this fox made her quite ill, with his eternal prowling about everywhere, and that she was beginning to be pestered with bad dreams, so that many a time she would scream in her sleep.

‘For, let me tell you,’ she pursued mysteriously, in answer to Peter’s enquiring look, ‘no living creature can deny himself and his nature, and live in an environment to which he has not been born.’

With these words Clicko retired completely into herself, and Peter understood now that nothing on earth could induce Clicko to say more, so he stole out of the stables, not knowing what to make of Clicko’s surprising pronouncements.

Now in White-ear there had taken place a remarkable change of late. Not only had he become big and strong and a full-grown fox, but he had also completely changed his whole demeanour.

Many a time a deep longing would come into his gaze, and he would grow restless and uneasy. Formerly he could lie for hours at a time in Molly’s small lap, dozing the time away, or lie in the chimney-corner taking his ease by the fire. But he now no longer found any satisfaction in that. Unrest had entered into his blood,

and he would no more allow himself to be patted and caressed as he used to do.

When he was in this mood he would run about whimpering and crying, and nobody dared to go near him, for then he would show his teeth, even to little Molly.

Every one thought it was the proximity of the hounds that troubled White-ear at such moments, so they tried to soothe him.

When the hounds came home from the hunt, they had, many a time, taken the direction of the kitchen, for they winded White-ear's scent, and it cost both the whippers-in and all the kennel-men no little trouble to quiet them and get them into the kennel.

This performance had been repeated regularly of late, and any one could see that there would have to be a change with White-ear, and that soon. The moment for it was, however, continually postponed, for during the time he had been at the Manor he had become a sort of household pet, and every one was fond of him, as he did no harm or wrong.

So things went on in the old strain.

But then something occurred which brought his stay at the Manor House to an abrupt conclusion—something that

happened on one of the last days of the season.

Hunting was drawing to a close, and the approach of spring was in the air.

White-ear was sitting in the kitchen window just after his midday meal, looking out towards the woods, and his longing for the natural wilds in which he had been born and bred asserted itself once more, this time with greater strength than ever before.

He became restless, and his ears began to swing backwards and forwards, a sure sign that the secret yearnings were intimating their presence once again.

But then he caught sight of something that turned his thoughts into a different channel for a moment—he saw Peter and Dreadnought charge over the yard in wild career, and vanish away across the fields.

White-ear stretched his neck and pricked his ears as he followed the course of the two dogs, till he discovered something that made him start—a little way in front he saw a fox making for the wood.

What White-ear had just seen took such a hold on him that it was as though he were himself being pursued by the dogs, and the recollection of his first meeting

with Dreadnought in the stables stood suddenly before him in all its horror.

A cold sweat of terror burst out on him till his fur was soaked, as he ran screaming about the kitchen.

Nobody had ever before seen White-ear so unmanageable and wild as he was now, and Molly was so upset that she began to sob bitterly, while Lizzie, the cook, stood with her hands on her hips, quite at her wits' end.

White-ear flew incessantly up and down in the kitchen window. Suddenly he raised himself on his hind legs and looked out through the window, standing now so still that not a muscle stirred in his shaggy body.

But all at once he began to snarl, and his fury grew greater and wilder than ever, for what he saw drove him quite uncontrollably frantic. And when Molly and all the maid-servants leaned out of the window to see what the uproar in the yard was about, they caught sight of John, who came hauling along the body of a great fox that had been killed.

They all understood now what had upset White-ear so terribly, and went out of the room, for they thought it was best to leave

him alone, which was in reality the only thing to be done in the case.

As has been related earlier, Dreadnought and Peter had at last succeeded in laying Mother Fox by the heels, but not before she had played them many a trick ; and it was of this that White-ear had been an involuntary witness, though he did not yet know that it was his own mother whom he had seen lying stiff and dead out in the yard, surrounded by triumphant human beings and animals. This he did not learn until later in the day.

When White-ear was left quite to himself in the great kitchen, his determination ripened little by little.

He had had a good time here, it was true, and there had never been any scarcity of food, and his thoughts dwelt at this moment with gratitude upon all those who had been kind to him.

First and foremost it was little Molly he remembered, but his thoughts dwelt also on John, for whom he had conceived a sort of affection, in so far as a fox can feel such a thing at all.

But, after all, this was no place for him!

It was like imprisonment, and all his native wildness rose up against it. Free

and unconfined would he be, and in the great woods would he seek his home, as all his fathers had done before him.

And now White-ear recalled the time of his childhood under the oak-root, all the glorious excursions he had made with his mother on plundering bent, and the golden freedom he had enjoyed. But he remembered, too, that need and famine had made their entry into the home, though the recollection of it was quite vague and dim compared with all the joy he had felt at roaming at will in the great woods, seeking out his own prey.

Yes, that golden freedom he would have, cost what it might ! and he rushed, snarling and screaming, about the kitchen, giddy with longing and passion.

That very evening he would carry out his purpose !

When he had arrived at this conclusion, calmness fell upon him, and every one now came pouring into the kitchen, John and Molly and Lizzie and the rest of the maids.

White-ear stood still a moment and looked at them uncertainly, not knowing how to behave ; for at sight of all these kind people it seemed as though he began to be shaken in his resolve.

But this lasted only a moment: the yearning came over him once more, though now one could see no outward sign of it; it was only his senses that were in revolt, and he neither winced nor moved a muscle.

Yes, it was true they had all been good to him, and it hurt him to part from them, but nature was inexorable—he must away and live his life as foxes live.

Nevertheless, White-ear wanted to thank them for the good time he had had here, and he jumped, whimpering, into Molly's lap, and she stroked and patted his fur, that was so nice and soft and warm. Afterwards, he went in turn to John and Lizzie and all the others.

When he had done he slipped away.

He walked quite slowly out by the kitchen door, just as he had done many a time before, and no one even dreamed what he was meditating.

A moment later he was standing out in the yard, filling his lungs with the fresh air, which had a soothing effect upon him.

He could now think clearly, and did not act precipitately.

The afternoon was already far advanced, and the day was drawing to its close.

The setting sun bathed the ridges of the

surrounding hills in his meagre ray, and twilight was settling down upon the fields. The air was fresh and chilly, and a moaning wind swept up the dale, giving warning of a storm.

White-ear walked sedately towards the stables. He knew that Dreadnought was shut up in the kennels, and therefore felt secure. He would just take a look at the horses, before he sped away in earnest.

But he had no more than put his nose in at the door when Clicko set up a piercing screech, which could be heard all over the stables—Lord knows what she had been dreaming about !

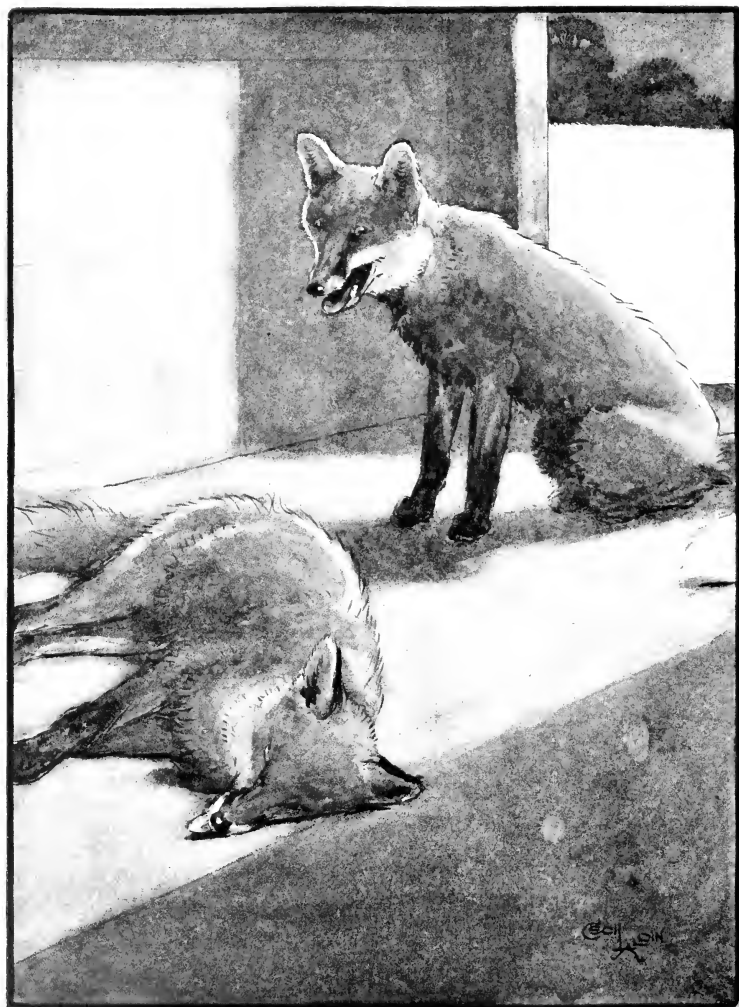
Even to White-ear it sounded so uncanny that he wheeled and ran round past the coach-house, which lay close by.

A peculiar smell, as though of some dead body, reached his nose here, and White-ear was seized by that eerie feeling which always seizes us when we stand face to face with one who is dead.

The smell grew stronger as he came nearer to the door of the coach-house, and he slunk in, uncertain and hesitating.

By now the weather was changing.

The wind had increased in strength, and was driving the storm-clouds away from the



Shaking in every muscle and fibre he drew nearer.

heavens, where a star or two twinkled feebly, and the moon, which had not calculated on coming out that afternoon, peeped in pale wonderment over the horizon. Heaven knew it was not she who had driven away the threatening storm, white and haggard as she was, poor thing!—dependent on the space-cooled ardour of the sun.

The moon let her pallid ray fall in through the windows of the coach-house, where White-ear at that moment was standing, frantic at what he saw there.

Flung carelessly away into a corner lay the dead fox Dreadnought and Peter had killed.

White-ear started involuntarily back in terror, for he was still young, and had never seen a dead fox before. Shaking in every muscle and fibre, he drew nearer little by little, and even ventured at last to sniff at the dead fox, which lay cold and stiff in the moonshine.

A shock went through White-ear, and he gave vent to a sorrowful wail, for there seemed something familiar about the creature, and, like lightning, the thought flashed through his brain that it was his own mother who lay there.

And White-ear was right, poor fellow; he now recognised her distinctly.

He recognised the sharp, drawn look about her snout, which death had made still sharper, and the great arches, splashed with white, about her eyes which now were closed. But about the snout there was also a drag of utter weariness and pain, which White-ear had not seen there before, and he understood that his mother must have passed through a terrible struggle before she gave in.

Yes, there, too, were the white hairs on one ear, hairs so small that only a fox could notice them ; but White-ear remembered how often his mother had said to him with pride that it was a thing which was peculiar to her family, and was a sign of toughness and vitality, so White-ear was glad that the white splashes had been handed down to him in so rich a heritage.

When White-ear discovered that it was his own mother that lay there, he was struck dumb with sorrow and despair. He circled about her, and called her by the old endearing names, but received no answer.

He spent a long, long time like this in gloomy despair, circling about Mother Fox as she lay there, cut off in the midst of her sins, with her white fangs grinning in the pale moonlight.

Fury at last took possession of the young

fox, as he passed out into the still night, and he swore a bloody vengeance; if he had now come upon Peter, he would have flown straight at his throat.

But vengeance lay nearer to hand—in the hen-house, from which came the appetising smell of poultry.

There he resolved to seek revenge.

Molly would be coming shortly to shut the door, so the thing was to act quickly, and White-ear therefore shaped his course determinedly toward the hen-house, where all the hens with the cock at their head had just gone to roost.

His eyes shone with vengeful hate as he sprang in at the door, slaughtering right and left, dealing out murderous bites amid the great flock of hens.

He killed in wild ecstasy, out of pure lust of killing, and his beast-of-prey nature, which had slumbered during the time he had been at the Manor, reached its fullest expression.

There were not many hens left alive, when, with the largest of the cocks in his mouth, he flashed away, making for the dark woods, which waved a welcome to him in the evening wind.

VII

WHITE-EAR's crime was found out the very same evening, and the hen-house became the scene of an assemblage of distracted people and animals.

There sat Molly in the midst of the dead flock of hens, weeping as bitterly as though her little heart would break, while John stood with both fists in his trouser-pockets and stared straight in front of him, without saying a word.

Every one was seized with horror at this work of destruction, but there was no one who broke the oppressive silence.

At last came Peter rushing distractedly with his tail between his legs ; but he had no sooner seen what was the reason for all this to-do, than away he flew, as fast as his legs could carry him, with his stumpy tail still farther between his legs.

For goodness' sake let him get away ! he thought, as he darted off.

It was as though Peter felt that he was not himself quite blameless for what had happened, for he ought to have prevented it—if only he had looked out.

But it wasn't always so easy for him, either, and he couldn't be everywhere at once, he consoled himself, as he flew into the stables.

The truth was that Peter, in his joy at having at last laid hold of Mother Fox, had not been able to deny himself the pleasure of telling all about it to a little lady friend he had in the neighbourhood, and there he had been whilst White-ear was committing his murderous act.

He stood for a moment and wagged his head, while all the horses turned about to wish him the usual good-evening, which on this occasion was not reciprocated.

Suddenly Clicko set up a piercing skirl, screeching so that even Peter started up.

'He's gone! Didn't I say a catastrophe would happen, and that no living creature could deny his nature!' and thereupon she heaved a sigh of relief, for Heaven knew that she, too, had been nervous of this fox.

When Clicko had said this she clucked something to herself, so low that it could scarcely be heard, about being a wise bird,

who never expressed an opinion on anything that she was not certain about; and there she sat once more, the oracle of the stables, over the mouse-grey polo-pony, which had just been awakened by her screeches, and therefore laid back his ears in displeasure.

Clicko's screeching recalled Peter to his senses, and he now flew up to the iron railings that divided the stables from the kennels, and where he and Dreadnought in old days had so often stood and shown each other their teeth.

He called to Dreadnought, and excitedly told him the great news.

There now arose a furious din, in which the whole kennel took part. All the horses wakened in terror, and reared and kicked, while some even broke loose and made for the way out.

Clicko started up again from her sleep, and flapped screeching about in the midst of the tumult, and this did not help to restore quietness.

Tranquillity did not return until John and all the stable-boys came up and let Dreadnought out of the kennel, restoring to him his old freedom completely.

When he came out into the fresh night air he rushed off to the hen-house, and

then made for the woods, straight on White-ear's scent. Peter also flew a little way with him, but thought better of it and turned back, for one could never know what might happen, and there was no one left at home to look after things.

But, early the next morning, Dreadnought came hobbling and limping back, having failed in his purpose, and related dejectedly that White-ear had taken to the river, for he had been casting about all night for his scent without being able to find it.

Dreadnought was old now, and the rheumatics had settled in his joints. The years had not dealt gently with the aged king, and he no longer led the hounds with the same ease as before.

And when one day one of his grandsons so far forgot himself in his excitement as to fly past him at one of the hunts, Father Dreadnought became so furious at this piece of impertinence that he rushed straight at his throat, clean forgetting the escaping fox.

This proved Dreadnought's last hunt, for a few days later he had vanished and was nowhere to be found.

Peter searched and searched for him, but all in vain. There was no one who could

give him any information as to where he was.

Perhaps it might pay to make enquiries of Miss, thought Peter one day, as he stood pondering at the stable door.

Miss was a cat, who divided her activities between the cow-house and the stables, where she was well liked by all the horses, among whom she had several good friends.

Peter tolerated her, chiefly because she made herself useful, for she pounced on many a rat that stole in from the fowl-yard, where there were lots of them.

Peter caught rats too, but regarded that sort of hunting as being beneath his dignity, and so gladly left it to Miss.

But neither could Miss give him any information as to where Dreadnought was to be found. She only said unsympathetically, as she arched her back and stretched her tail into the air, that she had always wondered how Dreadnought could last out at the hunts year after year, for such a long time.

Black Diamond had no news either.

She had just come home covered with honours, after winning some pretty good steeplechases.

Her interests now revolved exclusively

around racing and training, and she did nothing but talk about her prospects of winning the Grand National, for which she was to be entered next year. She was downright conceited and uppish when the talk fell on the rest of the hunters in the stable, and even forgot her own fox-hunting days.

Peter remarked to his sorrow this change in his best friend, and for that very reason his friendship slid into a mere indifferent camaraderie, whilst he became steadily more sensible of the gap left by old Pretender.

But Clicko the cockatoo sat on the back of the mouse-grey polo-pony, and dreamed of India, where the trees were so big and the flowers so red and yellow.

Peter trotted up to her. He knew that Clicko was a great philosopher and wiser than all other animals, and he thought that she might have something on her mind just now that she might wish to tell.

The taciturn bird, whom nobody ever really fathomed, awoke from her meditations, and related, whilst the little pony tossed his head and pricked up his ears, that she had had a strange and beautiful dream that night.

She had seen a large number of fox-

hounds, handsomer and larger than ordinary fox-hounds, and among them she distinctly recognised Dreadnought and many others, with whom she had formerly lived. But she had also seen human beings and horses, who seemed to her to be old acquaintances, only so much more beautiful and happy—nay more, The Pretender was the M.F.H.'s favourite horse up there. There had also been birds that were more lovely than even the peacocks in the tropics, and there were meadows that were greener and flowers that were redder and more yellow than in India itself. And over all this animated scene was arched a wonderful, cloudless heaven, with a warm shining sun, concluded Clicko, and shut her eyes fast, and goodness knows how long she sat thus, wrapt in herself.

Peter, whose disturbed expression clearly showed that all he had heard passed his dog-understanding, slunk out of the stall considerably more confounded, but not a bit wiser than when he came—with stranger sensations than he had ever felt before.

In his need Peter came to think of the stable-birds, about whom as a rule he did not particularly bother himself. He remembered how often he had seen them fly high up towards the clouds in the sky,

especially in still weather, and how he had wondered to himself what they saw up there, for among the feathered inhabitants of the stables there were also some swallows.

So Peter asked all the little birds whether they had seen anything of Dreadnought—but they could tell him nothing either.

They only flew in terror out of the windows and away over the meadows, every time Peter applied to them. But a few swallows mounted straight into the air, and screamed as though they were already welcoming summer. They mounted higher and higher, as high as ever they could go, until they totally disappeared in the blue sky.

Now the people of the district wondered at the early return of the swallows to the land, for the east winds still prevailed, and the farmer looked forward with gladness to the good year that was to come.

In the kennels there was great sorrow.

Old Purple, who of late years had suffered from a weak heart, had had a relapse, and her condition was hopeless. She lay apart, in one corner of the kennel, surrounded by her puppies, breathing heavily, and calling at times for her help-mate Dreadnought, and she could not understand at all why he did not come.

In the outer yard there was a hound-fight, for a rumour was rife that Dreadnought was gone for good, and the hounds were now disputing as to who should be overlord.

‘The title is mine,’ said Conqueror, a big and powerful hound, with an unusually broad chest, ‘for it was I who flew past Dreadnought at the last hunt, and thereby have I proved myself to be his rightful heir.’

Of course there was a rival, who asserted that *he* was the only one entitled to occupy the position of king of the kennel.

So between these two took place a terrible fight, which ended at last in favour of Conqueror, and all now recognised him as the only possible leader of the kennel—nor indeed had any of the other hounds ever doubted his claim. . . .

So Conqueror became Dreadnought’s successor and inherited all his privileges, one of the most valued of these being that he did not need always to be locked up in the kennels with the other hounds, but was allowed to roam about at his own sweet will.

At last Peter gave up asking for Dreadnought any more, and flew up into the hay-loft, where he composed his own version of what had happened.

He fell ill, lost his appetite, and shunned the light of day. The daintiest meals stood untouched before him, and he grew thin and bedraggled.

Thus he spent a long, long time, and it was only when the Master himself came up to see to him that he began to take a little nourishment.

The desire for life at last came back to him, and one day Peter actually came down into the stables, and henceforward resumed his regular inspections.

He had still many years to live, he thought one morning, and out of pure wantonness and excess of vitality he gave chase to Miss, whose visits to the stables struck him as being superfluously frequent of late.

Peter pursued the cat away across the garden, till Miss took refuge in a pear tree, whence she spat furiously down at him. But Peter only wanted to give her a little reminder of his existence, and withdrew, taking the path to the Look-out, one of the garden's grassy slopes, where he came to a standstill and looked out over the glen.

It was the first spring day of the year.

The mist, which lay clammily over the river-bed, lifted and crept up the hill-

sides, where the pale sunbeams of springtime struggled to disperse it. A refreshing breeze swept over the meadows, banishing the last suspicion of wintry chilliness from the air.

The tree-tops were nodding in the wind, and telling each other that spring had now come to stay, and all the little birds sang in accompaniment.

All this did Peter see. He hailed with gladness Nature's new life, in spite of the fact that it meant an end of hunting.

But Peter did not think of that now. . . . He only rejoiced to see all the budding life around him. It had a rejuvenating effect upon him as well, for all his old joy of life came back to him.

Just as Nature was stirring and wakening to life, so also did all sadness vanish from Peter's heart, and it befell Peter, as it befalls us all—he chose to live for the things that have life.

He learned to know new human beings and new horses and hounds, and also in the course of time acquired new friends.

But as Peter grew older he felt his loneliness, and at last settled down with a grand-daughter of his first fancy, who was Beauty, as you have heard, and brought up a large family every year.

PART III
THE LAW OF RETRIBUTION

Nobody can boast of being without faults, for life is but a struggle between the good and evil element, the turns of which vary according to the conditions of life itself.—N. H.

I

A REFRESHING breeze played about White-ear's ears, when late that evening he rushed away in response to Nature's call, and the fresh air had a soothing effect upon his mind.

His instinct led him down to the river, there to wash out every trace of his flight ; and he swam both fast and far, holding in his muzzle the murdered cock he had lifted from the poultry-yard, before he ventured ashore.

Dripping water and gasping for breath—for goodness knows it was not so easy to swim with a soaking wet cock in his mouth—he first took a little rest. An indescribable joy seized him when he found himself at boundless liberty, and he rushed, dancing and skipping, away over the bank of the river in an ecstasy of wild abandon.

But thoughts at last began to crowd in upon him, and he now could reason more coolly.

He recalled the days of his childhood which he so often bore in mind ; but it was more especially the wild flight from the home that rose up in his memory, and White-ear realised that he must flee far, far hence if he held his life dear. He remembered how Mother Fox with all her family had taken to the hills to be safe from pursuers, but he also recollected quite distinctly that food had been conspicuous by its absence from these wild regions.

He chose, however, with determination to seek out a spot where for the moment he might have peace, for he had enough food in the cock not to suffer want quite at the outset, and afterwards the future must show him which path to take. . . .

So White-ear wended his way to the same parts where, as quite a little fox, he had begun to struggle for life on his own account, and there he enjoyed his freedom to the full, for the real battle for existence had not yet commenced for him.

But when the cock was consumed down to the beak and the claws, and White-ear had hunted in vain a whole day for prey, famine began to stare him in the face, and he understood that a life of boundless freedom was not all gladness.

An unutterable terror of the hounds, acquired the day that Dreadnought caught sight of him in the stables, prevented him from descending to lower regions; even when the second day of fasting had passed by, he put away from him as an impossibility every thought of going down yonder into the dales.

But as the days went on, his mind turned by degrees to what at first had seemed so dread-inspiring.

Spring was in the air, and the gentle sun had begun its work.

It was bringing trees, flowers, and fields to life, and was spreading over the meadows that green covering which is an unmistakable sign that Mother Earth has slipped away from winter's cold embrace.

These sure tokens of spring filled White-ear with an unending joy, for he recalled, as one of the first things his mother had told him, that, as soon as the birds began to twitter and the grass to grow, all hunting ceased, and from that time forth foxes might live in peace and quietness without fear of the hounds.

So White-ear made his way down to the great woods, where a life of joyous abundance opened up before him.

He became the dread and terror of all the smaller birds, separating ruthlessly mother from young and father from help-mate.

But White-ear became, most of all, the terror of the little rabbits.

He killed them in hundreds, and nothing gave him greater satisfaction than to play with them before taking their lives. He could keep a game like this going for hours at a time, until the little rabbits' eyes grew fixed with fear, and they gave up trying to escape any more, but lay so still, so still, waiting for their inevitable fate.

There was nothing that brought White-ear more to feel his omnipotence over all those who were weaker than himself than such a game as this, and it gave him a sensation of unspeakable delight.

All his dormant instincts awoke in this unfettered liberty to full expression, and he became giddy in his lust to see blood.

Day and night alike he ranged about after prey, and killed only for the sake of killing.

In this way he gave vent to the unbridled passions which he had been unable to satisfy before, because of his long captivity.

His thirst for blood developed day by

day. The tame hunting of rabbits, hares, and birds no longer satisfied him, and one light summer night he even ventured down to inhabited parts, to take up the struggle on the domains of man, where now and then he found occasion to snap up a fowl.

But whenever he seemed in this way to have drawn men's notice upon him, he was wise enough to disappear, and never showed himself twice on the scenes of his misdeeds ; for he had gradually come to realise that it was just this that had proved his mother's bane—that she had kept to the same districts, and not sought fresh pastures for her raids.

Thus it was that White-ear drew farther and farther north and west upon his wanderings, and, when the summer was at its warmest, found himself in a region of wild and lofty mountains, in a country known as the Western Highlands.

From this time White-ear's real struggle for life began, for here there was but little game that a fox could succeed in killing, and many who competed for it, so that he must put forth all his cunning and strength to procure enough for his daily needs.

Here, too, it befell him many a time that

he must fight a hard fight to keep the prey he had so arduously killed.

It was now that White-ear thought with regret of the days when he had hunted rabbits in the lowlands till he had felt replete at the very sight of them, and nothing now would have seemed a greater dainty, gaunt as he was from lack of nourishment. He was often hard put to it, but the daily round of privation developed his strength and endurance to a degree that served him well in after-life.

In this time of adversity White-ear's inroads on the preserves of man grew more frequent, and his audacity became ever greater.

One day he lay in ambush outside a poor fisherman's hut, waiting for a chance to snap up one of the few fowls whose custom it was to pick up grains of corn and any leavings that might be thrown outside the kitchen door.

It was already late in the afternoon, and twilight was falling. All hope of booty seemed vain, for the hens had long since gone to roost. It was the evening of the second day that White-ear had gone without food, so he was prepared to take some risks in order to appease his hunger.



This she poured remorselessly over White-car.

Now the kitchen door was standing open, and, in his recklessness, which in consequence of his hunger knew no bounds, White-ear crept stealthily up the steps.

An appetising odour of roasted meat streamed towards him, as he stopped and spied cautiously to all sides, to discover if possible any approaching danger ; but peace and quietness reigned undisturbed.

White-ear darted resolutely into the kitchen, but came to a sudden standstill in surprise, and stood as though nailed to the floor, for, over by the hearth, a young fisher-wife was tending the cooking and at the same time rocking her baby to sleep.

White-ear was so taken aback at this unexpected vision that he stood a few moments unable to move.

But the fisher-wife, who had caught sight of him, was a woman of determination and not lacking in presence of mind.

She profited by his indecision to seize the thing nearest her hand, which happened to be a pan of boiling water. This she poured remorselessly over White-ear, who vanished, squealing with pain and fury, for the water had scalded his sensitive snout.

His intense hatred of the human race and all that pertained to it assumed hence-

forward a more bloodthirsty character, and he swore an awful vengeance, as he flew off in the stillness of the summer evening.

The fisher-wife rocked her babe in vain that night, so startled had it been at White-ear's visit.

It screamed and cried until far on into the night, and not before the dawn broke into the little room did it fall wearily into an uneasy sleep, a sleep that brought neither rest nor recreation.

II

THE scalding-hot water which had been poured over White-ear caused him intolerable pain.

Yes, his mother had been right after all, he thought, with hatred in his heart, when she had said that day long ago, whilst White-ear and his brothers were still quite small, that life was nothing but a struggle to live.

Suddenly the likeness of Mother Fox rose before him, as she was that evening when he found her lying dead in the moonshine. The memory of it laid hold of him with such force that he now felt neither hunger nor pain, and pressed on still farther into the wilds in a delirium of breathless haste.

His hatred of mankind grew still more insatiate, and he understood that men were his born enemies, by Nature's own pre-ordination.

White-ear clean forgot that it was human compassion he had to thank for his very existence—but one could not blame him too much for that. He was but a fox after all, and was guilty of no more than men so often are, when they forget past favours, as soon as they are crossed in anything.

White-ear became so deeply submerged in all the thoughts that flooded his mind, that he was quite swept away ; he only ran and ran, and ascended steadily into wilder and wilder regions, till at last he did not know where he was.

The clear summer night had fallen when what is now to be related came to pass.

The air was as transparent and light as daytime is in autumn, but the mighty silence of Nature, broken only by the heave of the swell and the whispering of the night-wind in the trees' meagre tops, was proof enough that it was night, when all things of life were gone to rest.

But White-ear had no idea whether it was night or day, and indeed it was a matter of indifference to him. He made but little distinction between the two, except in so far as he had often welcomed the coming of night as a favourable time for taking the life of sleeping things.

He only ran onward farther and farther.

In his restless, hurrying flight he found himself at last held-up in the mountains, as animals so often do, and there is then nothing that can end their sufferings but an ignominious death by starvation—a case in which death comes as a deliverer.

Above him White-ear had the soft blue sky and the cold cliff, whose dizzy heights fell beneath him into the sea that broke upon its base. Whichever way he looked he saw nothing but the grey face of the barren cliffs, whose harsh, inexorable features even the warm summer sun can soften with no smiling touch of green.

White-ear could not go back, for the path that he had followed in his raving mood had grown narrower and narrower, and at last so narrow that even a fox could not turn.

There he stood.

The naked truth confronted him in all its cruelty, and he forgot both hatred and the pangs of hunger, for his instinct told him that he stood face to face with death. It took possession of him in all its horror, and he stood in dumb petrification in the grasp of the impotence that both men and

animals feel when the icy hand of death reaches out towards them.

Soon he grew hot with feverish terror at the frightful fate that awaited him, and a dry, foamy sweat flecked his warm fur. Then an icy chill swept over him, and he quaked in every muscle, so that he was in danger of falling out over the precipitous cliffs. Involuntarily his dumb agony gave place to cries, low whines at first, but growing in desperation to screams which the cliffs shrieked out over the sea and woods with redoubled strength.

White-ear screamed as he had done when quite a little fox, that time he had come near to dying, only now his screams were stronger and more piercing, for he had long since come to his full growth.

He stood like this for a while and gave vent to his insensate despair, which mingled with the monotonous crash of the breakers and the night-song of the tree-tops—Nature's dirge at poor White-ear's speeding.

However, his despair had attracted attention, for the deep clefts and ledges of the cliff were full of birds, which passed the night there and had been disturbed in their slumber.

Signs of life at last began to show themselves in the numerous crannies. First the beak of one grim bird of prey appeared, then of another, and here and there an indignant scream or two from clefts in the rock blended with White-ear's death-cries, till finally there resounded one loud, unanimous protest at this unusual disturbance of their night's rest.

White-ear's cries had shrilled piercingly enough through the silence of the night, but the whirlwind of fury that now arose subdued completely the poor fox's voice, and made many a little seabird's heart flutter with terror, for White-ear's reckless haste had carried him into the haunts of the great ospreys, the kings of sea and space.

What next befell White-ear has perhaps never fallen to the lot of any other fox.

The cry that now echoed over the cliffs was so fierce and loud that it even succeeded in distracting White-ear's thoughts of death for a moment, and the tortured fox stood still in silent wonder. But whilst the storm of screams raged at its worst, White-ear saw a huge bird sail with long strokes of his wings out over the sea, and return in a wide circle to settle on a ledge just above him.

There the great bird sat, looking at

White-ear, whose eyes, as though drawn by some magnetic force, followed the mighty eagle's slightest motion.

The screams of all the other eagles died away at this moment, and silence reigned over the night once more.

The great eagle sat motionless where he had alighted. Not even a feather stirred upon him. His eyes alone grew larger and larger in their greed, and it was as though by his mere glance he would blast the flicker of life that still remained in White-ear, who was almost paralysed with fear.

When White-ear afterwards recalled this adventure to memory he could never understand how it was that he had not fallen out over the cliffs just then.

'Oh, I am only a poor little fox, almost dead of hunger, who have lost my way in these wild regions,' whined White-ear piteously at last, and so broke the awful silence.

But the mighty eagle sat just as immovable, and seemed not to take the least notice of White-ear's plaintive words. He sat in his crushing silence, with his powerful talons gripping the cliff.

White-ear had long since discovered that it was the kings of the air, the eagles, he

had encountered, and at this moment, when he felt his life worth not even that of one of those rabbits that he had formerly killed in such numbers, his presence of mind and his senses came back to him in all their keenness, as is also the case with us men when we find ourselves in situations in which a moment may mean life or death.

So he began to try the effect of flattery, as all foxes do when they are confronted with superior strength.

‘Thou king and conqueror of the air and heavens,’ continued White-ear. ‘Where are the limits of thine omnipotence? It is boundless as the ocean that rings the whole earth about, and limitless as the heavens in their glory.’

Flattery always has its effect, even unconsciously.

And so it was in this case, for the great bird opened his beak, so that White-ear could distinctly see his red, flickering tongue, and he heard how the eagle clucked, far down in his throat, that it was a true word—king of the eagles he was, and had been for many, many years, marked out so to be from his very birth.

The fact of the matter was that this eagle, who now sat in judgment over White-ear,

really was the king and marshal of all the sea-eagles, for he was enormous in size and strength, and there was no other eagle who could boast of having nearly so large a beak or such fearful talons as he had. His unusual size he owed to the origin of his family; for, far, far, far back in time, one of his forefathers had mated with a golden eagle, and since then his descendants had always grown bigger than the ordinary osprey, who is considerably smaller than his brother, who has his hunting-grounds ashore.

Now and then a specimen would crop up who bore such likeness and affinity to the golden eagle of that early and mysterious alliance that he really resembled one in every detail, but had preserved the osprey's indomitable wildness of disposition.

It was seldom an eagle was born who thus combined the distinguishing characteristics of both breeds in so marked and clearly defined a manner, but just such a specimen was the eagle who sat in overwhelming silence, bowed over the tortured fox, upon a Scottish cliff that summer night, and he was, in very truth, fearful in his wildness and strength.

Conqueror of all the sea-eagles was he, and many a golden eagle, too, had he con-

quered in the terrible battles which had taken place during spring and autumn, both in the woods and on his own preserves.

The mighty bird still sat unmoved and glowered at White-ear, who was now beside himself with despair, for he understood that it was but a question of moments when the eagle's talons would seize him and despatch him into eternity, just as crushingly, silently, and heartlessly as the eagle now sat and tortured his victim.

An impatient scream or two from the clefts could be heard, and the screams became more frequent, for the ospreys were beginning to find the tragedy too long and tedious.

'Lay hold and kill him, and drop him into the sea, or let him be crushed upon the rocks on the shore,' screamed a young eagle hotly, and flapped away.

'Nay, hack out his eyes first,' suggested another eagle who was older; and having said this, he drew back into the depths of his own cranny to hide himself, for his ever-watchful eye had marked the first signs of fury in the king-eagle, who did not much care to receive advice from his subjects.

The great eagle's neck-feathers bristled,

but otherwise he sat just as unmoved as before.

White-ear had now surrendered all hope.

He made himself as little as possible, whilst an icy coldness swept through him, in anticipation of the coming death, and the same symptoms of deadly fear appeared in him as in the little rabbits whom he had formerly tortured in a similar way.

At this moment a saving idea shot through White-ear's brain, and he began again to speak in a voice that was hoarse and shaking with dread.

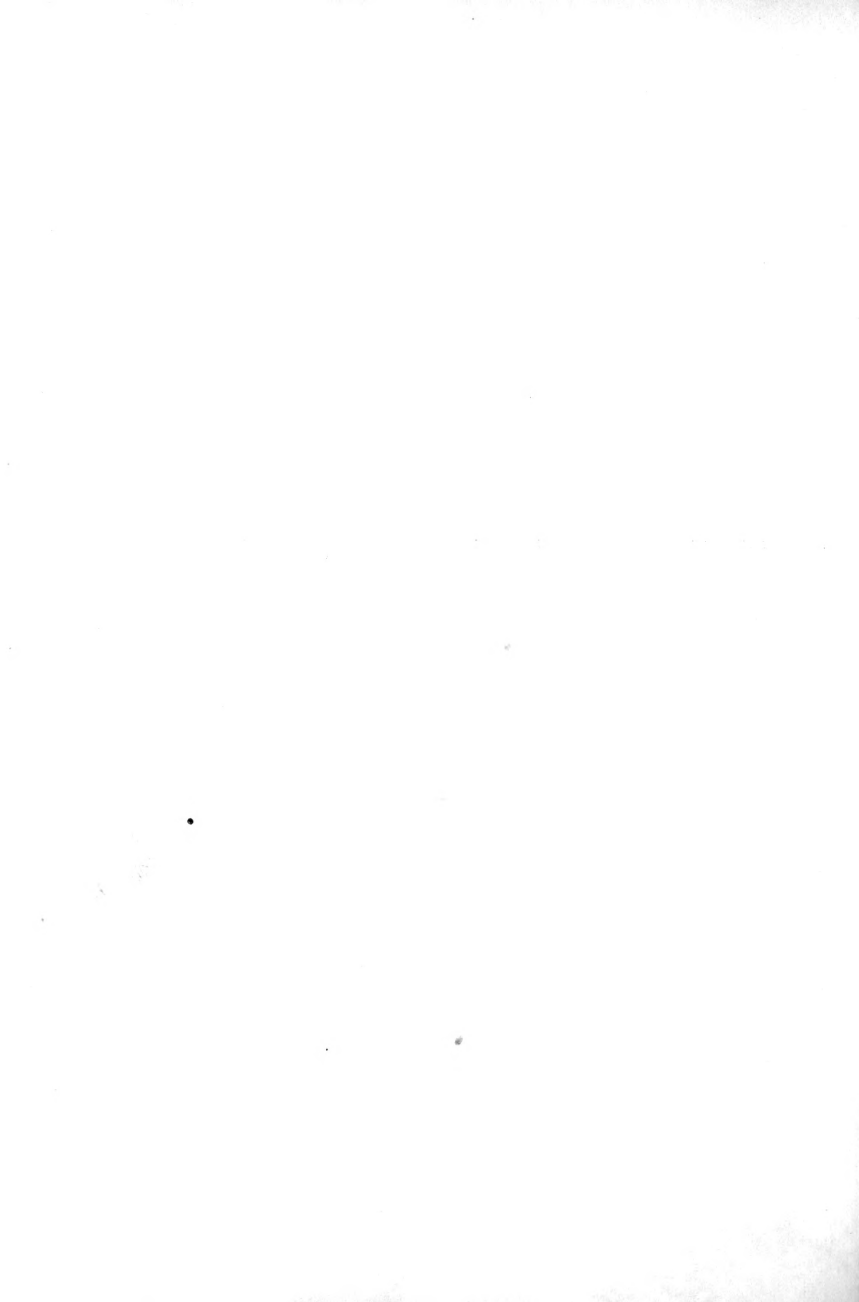
He had once been told by another fox, whom he had met in these parts, and who was grey with age, that there was nothing eagles liked better than the flesh of human beings, and White-ear now came to think of the little child he had seen in the fisherman's cottage, where he had met with such rough usage.

So, as a last resource to save his life, White-ear whined piteously that he would reveal a secret to the conqueror of the air, would he but spare his wretched life.

The great eagle did but direct his eyes still more questioningly and penetratingly upon White-ear, and it was as though the tortured fox felt compelled by some un-



Fixing his talons in White-ear's fur, flew away towards
the open sea.



known power to reveal his secret, although he had received no promise of his life.

So he continued, and said that he knew of a place, not far away, where there was a little child, so delicate and tender—a fitting morsel for the lord of the air and his peers.

At these words the great bird was as though transformed, and his cold, inexorable silence gave place to life and interest, as he stooped over White-ear, and commanded him to relate all he knew of this matter.

The great eagle had never tasted human flesh himself, but he had heard say that nothing was so dainty; and he remembered a story that told how one of his ancestors, once upon a time, many, many years ago, had carried off a little child and brought it to his eyrie, and how such a battle had raged for the tasty morsel that no fewer than eight eagles were left upon the field.

So the king-eagle's eyes shone with desire as White-ear told his tale, and he promised to save White-ear's life if he would in very truth help him to this rare and valuable prize.

With these words he mounted into the air, and circled once or twice, then flashed down like a thunder-bolt, and, fixing his talons in White-ear's fur, flew away towards

the open sea, whilst all the ospreys vented their long-restrained impatience in ear-piercing screams.

White-ear was more dead than alive with fright as he was borne at a giddy speed through the air, and he fully believed that his last hour was come. His senses were so befogged that he no longer felt any pain, in spite of the fact that the eagle's fearful talons bored deep into his flesh, and the red blood flowed.

All that now passed was but a dream to White-ear, and he recollected nothing of his voyage through the night, when he tried to recall it to memory afterwards.

The eagle sped out over the sea with White-ear, and, when he had shown him his broad kingdom, wheeled back towards land and made for the great woods.

Here he sank slowly down to earth, and loosed his hold on White-ear's fur.

As soon as White-ear felt firm ground beneath him he came, little by little, to himself, and then he saw the great eagle who had saved his life sitting over him silent and brooding, following him with his black eyes, as he had done just now up in the haunts of the ospreys.

White-ear shook with horror at the very

sight of this frightful form he could never be quit of, and beginning to whimper piteously, he whined that he was dying of hunger.

At this the king-eagle rose, and vanished through the air with a rushing noise, but returned in a short time holding in his talons a ptarmigan, which his keen eyes had spied sleeping in the top of a pine tree.

He let it fall before White-ear, who greedily began to drink its reeking blood, which gave him new vitality.

The king-eagle, however, who now saw how exhausted White-ear was, opened his beak and screamed with threatening voice that he would come back later so that White-ear might redeem his promise.

‘Remember,’ he concluded, ‘I have eyes that see all things, and am always able to follow you, when I circle high in the vault of heaven.’

With this he vanished, and White-ear could hear the beating of his wings, as he sailed out towards the sea, where a gale was now blowing up.

Shortly afterwards White-ear fell into a restless sleep, and in his dreams relived all the horrors he had passed through. He saw it all once more, down to the smallest detail,

and his screams of fear and terror rang weirdly as dawn broke over the land.

That night a panic-stricken ptarmigan sat in the branches of a pine tree and shivered with fright, till her little heart was like to burst, for she had just been robbed of her mate, and now she sat there alone. . . .

III

THUS it was that White-ear made covenant with the eagles, though not exactly of his own choice, for his compact oppressed him like some horrible nightmare.

But the eagles understood that this fox, whom they had encountered under such strange conditions, might be of service to them, so they did not let him out of their sight ; for they were firmly resolved to exact payment of the ransom, which White-ear had led them to expect in exchange for his life.

When the king-eagle left White-ear to himself, the poor fox fell fast asleep as we have heard, weary and worn as he was after his experiences.

He slept for many, many hours, and the day was already far advanced when he awoke from his troubled dreams. But he fell asleep once more, and this time it was an invigorating repose that came over him.

He slept without a break till the next day dawned broadly, and when he awoke he was rested and filled with new strength.

He stretched his limbs luxuriously, and enjoyed in peace and comfort a morning meal composed of the murdered ptarmigan which the king-eagle had brought him.

He now thought quietly over his remarkable and horrible experiences, which were calculated, indeed, to give a fox food for reflection and reason for despair.

White-ear realised the full scope of the promises which he had extended, and whose fulfilment seemed impracticable. He was absolutely aghast at the thought of them; for he knew that the eagles would not fail to take his life, and that there would be a bloody vengeance if he did not keep his word.

First of all, of course, he thought of shirking his engagement and fleeing to the lowlands, but then he came to recall the king-eagle's last words before he departed:

'Remember, I have eyes that see all things, and am always able to follow you'; and every thought of flight seemed equally impossible.

This point of view received complete confirmation when he heard a rustling noise

in the air, as of the wing-beats of some large bird, and, for a few seconds, it was as though he lost his breath entirely, so strong was the rush of air—for it was the mighty eagle, who had plunged to earth just before him with the speed of lightning.

There he sat once more in his crushing silence, but now quite close to White-ear, and demanded plainly enough by his mere presence the fulfilment of that promise, which he was now awaiting.

An ominous silence ensued, overwhelming in its fearsomeness, and when White-ear at last began to speak, his tongue rattled in his mouth for very fright, and he could scarcely contrive to say what he wanted to.

First he began to complain of great pain, and that he was still so tired, so tired—really far too feeble to go stalking so valuable a prize as was now in question; for that a fox's whole cunning and slyness were needed.

The king-eagle must have mercy on him, said White-ear finally, with fear and trembling in his voice, and give him time to regain his strength, and then White-ear was not the fox to fail of what he had promised.

But the huge bird made no answer.

He did but sit there brooding and silent,

motionless in his inflexibility, and began to show signs of impatience; for his neck-feathers rose, and he made a few hot beats with his wings, which again caused White-ear to snap hard for breath and shake with dread.

White-ear began again shortly to beg for a reprieve, and declared that he could not yet walk for pain, for both his flanks were caked with stiffened blood from the wounds inflicted by the eagle's talons, so deeply had they bored into his flesh.

At these words the eagle's gathering rage was appeased, for White-ear had spoken the truth; his talons had indeed mangled him terribly, and even an eagle could understand that the wounds of his embrace must cause White-ear exquisite pain every time he moved.

So he said at last that he would grant yet a little while for his wounds to heal, and, this said, prepared to take wing and vanish.

But White-ear, who had regained his courage at the happy turn things had taken, whined in a piteous voice:

'Do you then wish that I shall lie here and die of hunger?—for I myself can procure no food, so miserable as I am.'

The king-eagle seemed, however, to have taken no heed to White-ear's last words, for he pursued his flight, circling about high up in the air.

But, as he did so, he sent his keen eyes roving over the landscape.

Then, after flying a little way in a southerly direction, he stooped straight down into the bottom of a dried-up water-course, and now there was one hare-life less in the Highlands.

With the murdered hare in his talons he returned to Reynard, for he knew that it would take one and two, perhaps even more days, before the fox could so far regain his strength that he might redeem his promise.

Thereupon he flew, screaming, out towards the sea that lay smooth as a mirror in the clear autumn morning.

Fortified by the rich food and his long rest, White-ear won back his old strength, and with it were restored his keen senses, his audacity, and his cunning.

The events of the last few days were fresh in his mind, and loomed threateningly over him, more especially at nightfall when darkness came on.

He had an indescribable terror of this eagle, with whom he had leagued himself;

although the thought often struck him, too, that it would be rather pleasant to go on having his meals served up in so easy a manner as he had done of late, thanks to the king of the air.

But, when all was said and done, he would have preferred not to have entered into any compact ; for the difficulty of fulfilling his part of the bargain seemed to become more insurmountable with every day that passed.

His vow must soon be redeemed, that he knew ; for he had many a time seen the great bird wheeling and spying high up in the sky, and he knew that the eagle was keeping his eye upon him and would one day come in person.

The day came.

It was a bright sunny Sabbath morning, and summer was displaying herself in all her splendour, although the sun had no great warmth that day, for the first signs of autumn were beginning to steal in from the sea.

It was one of those days when summer puts on all her beauty, before finally yielding to autumn's golden sway.

Nature, too, was keeping the Sabbath, and all was so peaceful and still. Even White-

ear had determined not to go hunting that day, for he was still in a state of happy satisfaction after his Saturday's meal.

He stood by the shore, and looked out towards the sea at the multitude of feathered life.

There were kittiwakes and herring-gulls, wild duck and herons, and all were swimming and flying about so peacefully.

But high, high over all sailed the sea-eagles, floating majestically through the air upon their wings, surveying with contemptuous glance all the paltry life below upon the earth. For them, too, it was a day of rest, so they touched none of the little birds that were disporting themselves upon the strand in confident assurance that to-day there was rest and peace, with no danger at hand.

This fair sight and Nature's gentle mood had a calming effect upon White-ear, and peace came over his heart too, as he rejoiced at the manifold life in Nature.

But his gladness did not last long, for far away on the horizon he saw a little speck, and the speck grew larger and larger, and he could see how all the sea-eagles flew respectfully aside before it.

White-ear had not the least doubt that it was the king-eagle himself, and he marked

with a shudder that he laid his course towards the shore, where he himself was standing.

Within the space of a few seconds the eagle alighted close to the poor fox, who once more was overwhelmed by the great rush of air, and fought for breath—though perhaps his terror was as much to blame for that.

White-ear, who now realised that evasions would no longer serve, said to the king-eagle, who sat there silent and terrific as ever, that he had long awaited him, and that now the attempt must be made.

‘For, let me tell you,’ he continued in an ingratiating tone, ‘I am in hopes of managing it to-day ; it is a beautiful day, all peace and quietness.’

As a sign that he followed, the eagle merely opened his beak, and an evil and greedy look came into his eye.

‘You see over there to the north,’ pursued the fox, ‘there lies a little red-painted cottage. In it there lives a young fisherman with his wife, and they have a little child’—and as he said this a sly and cunning expression came over White-ear’s snout.

The grim bird began to move his neck, whilst he spread his talons and contracted

them by turns, showing every sign of having understood what White-ear had told him.

So White-ear went on to say that he had often seen the young fisherman's wife sitting on the grass with her child on her lap, particularly at noonday, when the cottage was warm and the sky cloudless.

Without heeding the eagle's impatience White-ear continued his story, and related that it had also happened that the young woman had gone upon some errand into the house, leaving the child alone upon the grass.

'It is of such a moment we must take advantage,' concluded the fox confidentially, and an expression of malice gleamed in his eyes. He felt that vengeance was at hand, and that nearer than he had dared to hope, for the reception he had met with from the fisher-wife that evening.

So when White-ear had enjoined the king-eagle to keep in the wood, where he would be concealed, and to take up his position in the top of a fir tree that stood hard by the cottage, thence to avail himself of the favourable moment, they both disappeared in a northerly direction, to make trial of their luck.

Deep in a creek, a few miles north of the place where the king-eagle and White-ear had last held counsel on this fearful plan, which they had now departed to put into execution, lay the little fisher-cottage.

It was painted red, as White-ear has already related, and it had also white window-frames, and a green-painted door. Down towards the water ran a modest little garden, in which all sorts of flowers and vegetables grew in beautiful disorder, but great yellow sunflowers and red carnations were specially abundant.

In this little homestead lived a young fisherman with his wife and little child, as White-ear has also already explained. The fisherman's aged father had found shelter under his son's roof; for rheumatism, brought on by the salt water and his life on the sea in storm and cold weather, had made him a cripple quite early in life.

Fishermen usually dwell in small communities, in their primitive huts that cluster here and there around the coasts, but it also happens that some of them prefer to live more alone, and then they will build themselves a cottage in some secure and sheltered nook, where the sea cannot reach them.

This was the case with the young fisher-

man and his wife who now come into the story.

As lovers they had picked out this spot to build their home upon, and there the little homestead now lay.

They had not been married many years, and were very fond of each other. They lived in their own little world, and when, after a time, a little child made its appearance, they believed they were the happiest couple on earth, and had nothing left to wish for.

It was a pretty, fair-haired little girl that God had given them.

She was now a year old, and could say both 'Father' and 'Mother'—she could even manage to say so difficult a word as 'Grandfather,' too, but of course only her mother understood it.

In a word, they lived happily, these folks, and were glad to be alive.

And then came that Sunday morning.

The family of four held a little service that day, for it was far across the loch to the kirk, and they could not make the journey every Sunday.

The aged grandfather read aloud out of an old book of sermons, which had been handed down from father to son for many

generations, whilst the young fisherman and his wife paid reverent attention.

The sermon dealt with the inscrutability of God, and the old man had plodded arduously through the many closely-printed pages—for in old days sermons were long—and, as he reverently closed the book, he repeated the last few lines, which he knew by heart, so often had he read them, and concluded with the words :

‘Inscrutable are the ways of God.’

These words of conclusion the old man uttered in a quavering voice, and carefully restored his horn-rimmed spectacles to their usual place upon the shelf.

Then they all sat a while in reverent silence, deep in their own reflections, until the little one began to cry.

The sun streamed gently through the window-panes, and shone full upon an oleograph of the Crucifixion, which hung on the opposite wall.

The little girl kept on crying, and though the mother did what she could to soothe her, her efforts had but little effect.

‘Take the bairn down to the shore a while,’ suggested the fisherman at last ; and added, as he threw open the door, ‘See how still and quiet the sea lies in the sun-

shine. It is a beautiful day, and the fresh air will do wee Maggie good.'

So the young woman went out into the garden, and sat upon a bench looking out over the sea, which lay so still and peaceful.

The yellow sunflowers were hanging their great heads, and the red carnations had long since lost their bloom, for autumn was in the air, and the grass had already begun to yellow.

She sat like this a long while, enjoying the beautiful scene, and the child fell asleep.

But, up in the top of a lonely fir tree beside the cottage, squatted a mighty eagle, who looked like a golden eagle, and he spied down towards the garden with greed in his eye, holding his glance fixed upon a certain spot all the time.

And at the foot of the fir tree a fox lay crouched, as foxes do when on plunder bent. His attention, too, seemed to be aroused by something in the little garden, for he lay quite still, gazing that way the whole time.

Thus they remained long, ever in the same attitude. At last the eagle began to grow impatient, and he hissed at Reynard, while his feathers rose like a necklace about his throat.

And White-ear, for it was none other,

understood that, unless he redeemed his pledge, his life would not be worth a toss.

So he lay there in desperation, cudgelling his brains how he should induce the woman to leave her child for a moment.

However, the minutes passed, and she still sat with her baby in her lap, and the eagle grew more and more furious.

All at once White-ear seemed to have a brilliant idea, for he sneaked cautiously off, after first having whispered something up to the king-eagle.

He realised that he must now take some risks, or else he might expect a horrible death, and he had resolved as a last resource to draw the woman's attention upon himself, in the hope that she might then leave the child's side.

So he slunk into the garden, and at the same moment the king-eagle rose from the fir tree, and circled high, high up in the air.

But the young mother was so engrossed in the calm and peace which rested over all nature that day, and her heart was still so filled with mild devotional thoughts and gratitude for her treasure—the little girl-child she held on her knee—that she did not discover White-ear at all, and it

was not until he ran past snarling, quite close to her, that she started up in dismay, and pressed her child still closer to her heart.

But when White-ear stopped a little way off, and stood growling at her persistently, she conceived the ill-fated thought of seizing an oar, which leaned up against a birch tree, to chase him away.

She set little Maggie down upon the grass for a moment, and ran towards White-ear, who slowly yielded ground and thus incited her to follow after, till she had moved a little distance away from the child.

Then the king of the eagles, poised high in the vault of heaven, wheeled in ever smaller and smaller circles, and seemed at last to rest quite still in the air. Suddenly he threw back his head, and darted like an arrow whizzing towards the earth.

He had stooped with lightning speed.

Seizing the little child in his talons, he disappeared screaming, with quick wing-beats, out over the sea.

So quickly had it all happened, that even White-ear did not realise that he had now fulfilled his awful promise, before the eagle had already flown a considerable distance seaward with his precious victim, whose

white Sunday frock waved a last farewell over the burnished surface of the water.

The poor fisher-wife seemed not to understand at all.

Her yellow hair turned white in that moment, and she lost the use of her tongue.

A devilish laughter took hold of her, a laughter that grew wilder and wilder as she stumbled down to the sea, and waded farther and farther out towards where she had seen her little Maggie vanish, till the cold salt water covered her anguish.

The young fisherman, too, found rest in the deep, for a few days later an empty boat came drifting shoreward, and there had been no storm or bad weather.

So the little homestead was left desolate and deserted, and in time became a ruin, for its only inhabitant was sorrow unspeakable.

High up in the clefts of the rocks, where the eagles had their eyries, hung a few tatters of a child's white dress, and one could see it had once had a red collar.

It fluttered in the wind, or hung limply against the cliff in still weather.

The remains of the white frock hung there long. Even the autumn gales could not make an end of them, only in course of time the white turned yellow.

In a little fishing-hamlet, hard by the place where this happened, lived an old fisherman.

Folk said that he was not quite right in his head, but he was perfectly harmless. Only when any one asked him a question, he always gave the self-same answer and pointed upward :

‘ Inscrutable are the ways of God.’

IV

ALL this was White-ear's doing.

He had committed the fearful sin of laying waste a home, in which peace and happiness had dwelt, a sin so atrocious that even death could not atone for it, or cover its blackness with the white mantle of forgiveness.

And yet there was so much that spoke in White-ear's extenuation. He had purchased a life for a life, paying for his own life with the life of others.

And do not we men, who boast of being lords of creation, often do the same ?

Is it not this that happens when we see one life advance triumphant, and another life trampled remorselessly under foot, in the eternal struggle for existence ?

With us, too, life is the price of life.

But White-ear would gladly have sacrificed this happy fisher household for the mere sport of it, even apart from his

vengeful feelings for that bucketful of hot water.

All his crafty nature craved for blood, and for the sight of living things yielding up their life overmastered by his artifice and cunning.

His confidence in himself grew more overweening each time he saw his misdoings crowned with success, till at last his audacity knew no bounds ; so that his latest achievement was, even for a fox, a masterpiece such as he had never hoped to accomplish.

The nightmare of horror that had obsessed his mind, in consequence of the promise which he had given and pledged his life to fulfil, left him now that he had redeemed his word, and he was no longer frightened to death of meeting the terrible eagle.

Early one autumn morning the eagle came again, and plunged to earth at White-ear's side, as he had done before.

To begin with he sat there silent as ever, but White-ear learned at last that a fearful battle had taken place between the eagles when the king of the air arrived with his prize. The king-eagle still looked exhausted after the fight. His left eye was hacked out, and his body was in many places

destitute of feathers and bore the marks of eagles' talons.

Between this bird and White-ear there now arose an alliance based on mutual advantage, and the eagle received many a word of good counsel from White-ear, while he in turn had many a fine bird served up without any exertion on his own part, when he was hardest pressed for food.

In consequence of his distant relationship to the land-eagles, the king-eagle had an innate predilection for the animals of the field, and, if anything, preferred them to fish and seabirds. But he was not alone in this taste, for no small number of the ospreys could trace their descent from the same connection as their king, and therefore had more or less the same inclinations as he had.

In this way rivalries sprang up, and the unity, which had formerly welded the eagle kingdom together, gave way to division, so that battles began to take place within the community of the sea-eagles.

As a rule these combats had their origin in some piece of booty which White-ear had indicated; at one time it was a fat little sucking-pig, at another time it was the little lambs that were the object of his

cunning,—for it was hard for him to kill them himself—the ram and the big sheep were too near for that—but they constituted no impediment to the eagles.

Thus there arose two contending factions among the eagles. One party sided with the old king, but its members were in the minority and consisted mainly of older eagles. The other party chose as its king a young and powerful eagle, who had already won himself a reputation by his greed and wildness.

Now, as it was difficult to serve two masters, White-ear's situation began at last to be untenable, although for a long time, with great cunning and adroitness, he contrived to remain on terms of friendship with both camps.

But this could not be kept up in the long run, for the new party was already beginning to become suspicious, and had secretly determined to destroy him when the opportunity offered itself.

Such an opportunity, however, it was not so easy to find, for the old king-eagle watched jealously over White-ear's safety, and it was incredible how ubiquitous he was even with his one eye. He had already saved White-ear once, when two young

eagles had fixed their talons in him, and both had paid for it with their lives.

However, White-ear's fears were seriously aroused, and he thought it was high time to change his quarters, or he would sooner or later lose his life here.

The old eagle was friendly disposed to him now, so he would perhaps understand, thought White-ear, and not put him to death if he were to find him afterwards.

One afternoon, as he stood on the shore surveying the great waves that broke upon the cliffs, he made up his mind to make a move southwards.

It had blown up to a gale, and all the seabirds were coming landwards on quickly beating wings.

Guillemots, herons, and wild duck flew inland over his head, and last of all came the ospreys, floating upon their mighty pinions, whilst the storm grew into a hurricane, and lashed the curling crests of the rollers till they broke into spuming foam.

White-ear slunk away into the darkness of the wood, and the gloom of night covered his going; but next morning he was far on his way south, for he had sped, unresting, onward through all the hours of darkness.

Although White-ear felt himself freed from his great obligation—for, after the king-eagle had gained possession of, and with his peers already devoured the ravished child, his alliance had passed into a more every-day phase—he nevertheless entertained considerable fears for what might happen if the king-eagle were to discover him in his flight.

So he fled on night and day, granting himself scant rest or respite in his headlong career. But now and then he was compelled to take shelter in some hole in the ground, and seek a little rest.

When he had travelled so far that all immediate danger of pursuit was over, his old terror of the hounds reasserted itself, and he began to hold himself in hiding during the daytime, for it was already far on in the autumn, and the packs had long since resumed their work.

In other words, he turned night into day, and made a point of travelling through inaccessible country, where hounds and horses could not reach him.

And so he lay one day in a stony gully, basking in the gentle rays of the westering sun.

It was far on in the afternoon, and the shadows were growing long.

He lay there in great contentment, consuming the last morsels of a hare he had killed the preceding day, and when he had finished his meal he fell asleep.

How long he lay slumbering like this is hard to say—it may have been several hours—but he awoke with a cry, and gasped hard for breath, as he had done on former occasions, when the king-eagle sought his company.

He did not know whether he was dreaming or wide awake, when he saw a great bird sitting at his side.

Yes, it really was the king-eagle, who sat there silent and fearful as ever.

It was no dream.

White-ear was once more overwhelmed with the old inexpressible terror, for he thought his last hour was now irrevocably come, and he rolled himself over the stones in mortal terror, screaming all the while for mercy on his wretched life.

The eagle seemed, however, to be in no wise affected by White-ear's despair, and sat in solemn silence on the self-same spot.

But at last he opened his beak, and said, with head bowed down to the ground, that his sway was now ended and that White-ear had done well to flee, as he would otherwise

have been killed. And the eagle flapped his mighty wings at these last words.

White-ear could now see that he must have been terribly misused, for his wings, formerly so magnificent, were thinned of their splendid array of feathers.

Indeed it appeared that the eagle, too, had fled like himself, under cover of the darkness of night, being no longer able to vindicate his position.

His supporters had fallen away one by one, till at last there was nothing left for him to do but seek out a new land for himself, where he would dwell in solitude for the remainder of his days. He would fare eastward over the sea to a land that stretched far north.

The aged eagle deigned no further explanation, but mounted into the air, and in this way parted from White-ear, without even saying farewell, and flew eastward with mighty wing-beats.

He crossed the North Sea, and, weathering the autumn storms, which sent many a ship to the bottom that year, came at last, after a trying journey, to a land where the cliffs were still mightier than in the Western Highlands, and this land was known as Norway.

He followed the coast-line ever northward, and, in a part where the snows lie eternal, at a place called the Altenfjord, he settled down at last.

Deep, deep in the recesses of this fjord, ringed about with lofty mountains of wild untrammelled beauty, he found himself among the heights a rocky cleft, which was dark and deep, and here he made his home in the solitude of Nature.

At the foot of the mountains dwelt Norwegian fishermen and a few Reindeer-Lapps, who also to a great extent lived by fishing.

The Scottish eagle soon became a scourge to the land, for once he saw his chance to ravish a Lapp baby, and later he carried off a little boy from a fisher family.

But he also met his bane, and this is how it happened.

A slender Frenchman came into those parts. He came travelling in Norway each year, to see the midnight sun shine redly in the sea, since he had made his fortune by speculating in cotton on the Liverpool Exchange.

Since then he had become a Nimrod, this slender little Frenchman, and many a polar bear and walrus, hunting trophies from his

expeditions in Northern lands, adorned his home in Paris.

This man heard tell of the eagle which devoured human flesh, and he swore he would have its life.

He was hunting that year in the mountains of the Altenfjord, and was so engrossed in his sport that he did not notice the midnight sun at all.

One day the lonely eagle came sailing in from the sea on lazily-beating wings, screaming his weird screams that made all the sea-birds quake with dread, when suddenly he crumpled up, pierced by the Frenchman's six-millimeter bullet.

His head, with its one eye, sank upon his hoary breast, and his mighty wings were folded in the swoon of death, as he hurtled to the shore, where he fell stone-dead, his solitary eye closed in the everlasting sleep.

V

ONCE White-ear had ascertained that he need now no longer entertain any fears of discovery, as the king-eagle had also fled, he began to take things more easily, although he still pressed steadily southward.

He gradually resumed his old ways of life, as they had been when he was in the lowlands, and he found that the struggle for existence was far easier here than in the Western Highlands.

But now something happened which turned his thoughts into a new channel.

One evening he had been hunting a leveret. It had long evaded him, but White-ear wore it down at last, and was just about to hurl himself upon it, when another fox started up in front of him and laid claim to the booty.

A fight seemed inevitable !

The two foxes faced each other snarling, and White-ear had already loosed his hold

on the slaughtered hare to launch himself upon the foe, when the latter suddenly emitted a long-drawn monotonous howl, that quenched all hostile purposes, and the two vanished side by side into the darkness of the wood.

With this vixen—for a vixen it was—White-ear entered into a wedlock which had a happy influence upon him, and little by little subdued his wildness and thirst for blood.

He was now no longer so eager to go hunting, but confined himself to killing sufficient for his own and his mate's keep. He grew lazy and drowsy, and preferred to keep quiet, dozing the day away in an earth he had found for his wife and himself. A comfortable tiredness had come over him—a tiredness which in some inexplicable manner pulsated through his whole body, and robbed him of all his strength.

The vixen, with whom he had thrown in his lot, exercised a singular influence upon him, and White-ear felt compelled by some power to lead the quiet life his consort chose to lead, although his whole nature rose in arms against it. But, at these moments, when he felt his absolute impotence strongest, he would be seized with a perfect fury

of resentment at finding himself an utter, abject slave.

Side by side they ranged the woods in quest of prey, these two; but there was no longer any dash or 'slimness' about White-ear's hunting. It was as though all his wild instincts were tamed by this vixen, who ran by his side emitting her long-drawn howls, which died away in the stillness of the woods.

But White-ear felt his strait fetters loosen little by little, and began to find greater pleasure in hunting by himself as in former days. Quite imperceptibly the vixen, who had hitherto occupied his interest to the exclusion of all else, became an object of indifference to him, like any ordinary fox, with whom he would, if necessary, be ready to do battle at a moment's notice.

Then one night White-ear really began to quarrel with her.

This proved sufficient to shatter the last frail tie that held them together, and White-ear started up and away, to seek out a path for himself in the wilds of Nature.

The winter that year was not hard; it was mild with much rain, and there was no frost to prevent hunting.

It was, consequently, an unusually good

hunting season, and the hounds many times came upon White-ear's scent, but he had never given them a run, for he nursed an indescribable dread of anything like a hound, and employed all his cunning and slyness to evade them.

He understood, for instance, that he must only in the utmost extremity break cover and flee out into the open in order to escape his pursuers. So he slunk upon his way from hiding-place to hiding-place, outwitting the hounds in the most inconceivable ways.

But as time went on he grew more accustomed to his persecutors; and it happened on one occasion, when White-ear felt particularly inclined for sport, that he took to the open fields and made straight for another covert, that lay not far off, and whose hiding-places he knew in and out.

The first attempt went off splendidly !

True enough, he was seized with an icy terror when he heard the hounds give tongue and the snorting horses after him, but fear lent him wings, and he flew like an arrow away over the meadows, leaving his pursuers far behind him; and when at last, breathless after the sharp burst, he slipped into an earth where he knew he was

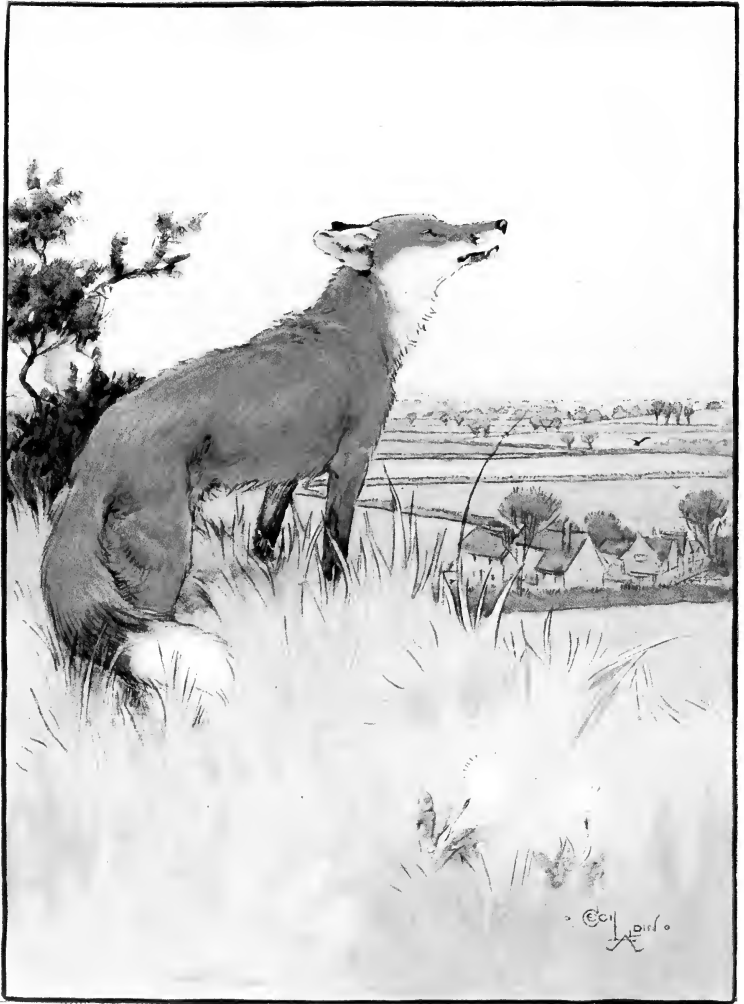
in safety, he could even be amused at the whole incident, and his self-confidence increased proportionately.

Encouraged by the success of his first attempt at sport, White-ear changed from being a fox who, at first, had always sneaked about in the neighbourhood of cover, into what is called a 'game fox.'

This may sound strange, but it was a long time before the process of development was completed.

At last he actually began to be fond of the sport, and always took care to give the hounds at least one run a month, because he understood that the training incidental to it steeled his nerves and muscles for the battle of life—for he had to fight hard enough many a time for his daily bread, even here in the lowlands!

When he was hunted like this he was often hard put to it, and it would happen at times, when he flew off and saw nothing but open country around him, that his self-confidence began to sink; and yet some loophole of escape had always shown itself in the end—now it was a river, now a flock of sheep or herd of cattle, and as the very last resource he had always gone to earth where he could not be dug out.



Looking down the valley he felt a sense of familiarity
in the parts.

So he lived the life that foxes live in England, and lived it for one year and two, and still longer, growing sinewy and tough, and making himself a terror to all the creatures of the field. He could endure equally well both heat and cold, and, thanks to his days of hardship in the Western Highlands, he could go without food for days and take no harm.

In the course of time it came about that he stood, one radiant day in spring, high up among some hills, looking down over a broad valley, and he somehow felt a sense of familiarity with the scene.

Little by little the vague impressions of his childhood's days grew stronger, till at last they assumed a definite form, and he now remembered all that he had then gone through.

His pointed snout grinned till the white fangs lay bare, and he had an interested expression in his cunning face as he slunk slowly down towards the dale.

It was not long before he was standing in the bottom of the valley, and he now recognised the buildings of the Manor, where he had spent the days of his youth.

He stood at attention, sniffing the wind, in case there should be any danger here—

for it was not only bright memories that welled in upon him now.

Then he caught sight of the rubbish-heap which had played so decisive a part in his life; and as all the frightful recollections of the crows that were so closely connected with it came back to him he began to shake with horror at the very thought.

The hounds in the kennels suddenly began to bay, and White-ear leaped into the air with a jerk, but calmness came over him again. He was now an old fox, and was not to be daunted so easily, for he knew that in spring foxes had nothing to fear from that quarter.

He kept on prowling about his old haunts the whole day, and was not himself at all, so excited was he by all the memories that surged up in his mind.

When evening fell there was moonlight, and the sinister recollection of Mother Fox and her mournful ending took such hold of White-ear that he got not a moment's rest, but roamed howling out into the pale moonbeams.

He felt his hatred of the human race grow more insatiable, and the end of that night's story was that he snapped up a cock, which was just about to go to roost and join



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W. A. WAIN

White-ear lay that night with his fat prize near the
rubbish heap.

the main body of the fowls, who had already been asleep for hours.

Goodness knows why the poor cock was out so late that evening—the fact remains that he sank down just outside the hen-house door without even a squawk, so quickly had White-ear sped him into eternity.

White-ear lay that night with his fat prize not far from the rubbish-heap, which stood right out in the open fields.

He was not at all afraid of the hounds now, yet he had not a moment's peace of mind, for he was thinking of all sorts of queer happenings, and marvelled much to find himself just here, within sight of the spot where he had commenced his life—yonder under the oak-root, which lay there exactly as it used to be.

On this occasion, too, it was Molly who discovered the theft next morning. She had now grown into a big girl, and got a scolding for not having shut the fowl-house door, although she made the excuse that it was years since she had lost any fowls.

But this time there was no tramp to be blamed for the stolen cock, and so it was quite reasonable that Molly must suffer for it—she was really the most appropriate person.

Next day the news quickly spread about the Manor that a cock had been killed. It came first to the ears of the animals through Peter, for there were plenty of bloodstains on the hen-walk after the deed of violence.

Peter felt vexed in his own mind, for he acknowledged to himself that a fox-terrier, who was chosen to be the guardian not only of the stables but of the whole establishment, ought to have prevented the outrage, and he was more than usually choleric that day.

The truth was, however, that Peter was beginning to get on in years, and had consequently not only become more than ordinarily excitable of temper, but also liked to retire early to rest, and this was the reason why he had noticed nothing.

The horses observed that something had happened at the time of the early morning inspection, for the light of day had scarcely begun to disperse the quietness of night, when they heard Peter's ringing voice in the stables, and more than one horse, who was not yet quite wide awake, got a taste of his teeth in his pasterns that morning, and was brought to his feet more early than usual.

Only the cockatoo, Clicko, still sat slumbering on the window-ledge, above

the stall where the mouse-grey polo-pony had formerly stood.

His place was occupied for the time being by a big black hunter, who paid occasional visits at the stables, for the little pony had long been gone. It was a mare called Iris, who suffered from nerves, but was otherwise gentle as a lamb.

Peter made a sudden halt at Iris's side, and was annoyed to see Clicko, under these unpleasant and serious circumstances, still sit sleeping as though nothing had happened.

But though he gave expression to his displeasure in the most unreserved terms, Clicko slept on as soundly as ever, while Iris alone turned her black head with the white star on the forehead towards Peter, and thus expressed her wonder at being disturbed in her morning rest in this rude manner.

Peter and Iris were on very good terms, and Peter had slept more than one night in her manger, now that he had no settled night-quarters, for in course of years Black Diamond had departed. As a consequence of her racing triumphs she had gone to a stud in Hungary, for a price that had been too temptingly large even for the Master.

Peter could not induce the slumbering Clicko to waken, do what he would, and it

was not until he jumped up into the manger, and thence to the window-ledge, and bellowed right into the sleepy cockatoo's ear that something had happened, that Clicko came back with a start to the facts of life, and, after scanning Peter with a contemptuous look, began to cover him with the most frightful abuse, such as she had never expended on any dog before.

Clicko, too, had grown hot-tempered as the years passed, and there was nothing she abominated more than being wakened—it always put her into veritable transports of fury.

But when Peter managed to get out what had happened, the little fox-terrier received such a fright as he had not had for a long time, for he saw Clicko topple down into Iris's box without a sound, and there she lay a long while as though dead, to Peter's and Iris's great dismay.

However, after a time she regained consciousness, and her fainting fit was succeeded by an attack of hysterics. She began to kick spasmodically with her thin legs, screeching incessantly the while that something awful was going to happen, as, indeed, she had always expected ; and the old lady lay in hysterics a long time, just

as cranky old maids do now and then, when they begin to get on in years. It didn't take much to disturb Clicko's equilibrium now, for she was getting more and more excitable as she grew older.

Still, she struggled at last to her feet, and flapped painfully up on to Iris's back, where she sat all in a bunch, and looked highly offended at having been startled into making an exhibition of her senile passions.

Iris turned once more her beautiful white-starred head, and enquired sympathetically how she was feeling, but, getting no answer, she left Clicko to her own devices, and stood gazing reflectively into the empty manger, waiting for breakfast.

Peter rushed about all over the place that day, and fell foul of every one. He simply had to vent his ill-temper on something, and his hectoring disposition caused general annoyance.

The hounds were the last to hear of what had occurred.

Conqueror, Dreadnought's successor, straightway set up a howl of indignation, and all the other hounds chimed in; for they all knew it must have been a fox that had been at work, and they swore venge-

ance as soon as spring and summer were over.

This howl for vengeance reached the ears of White-ear, who lay at his ease in a thorn-brake near the rubbish-heap basking in the morning sun.

A spasm shot through him, as the old dread of the hounds knocked at his heart once more, but this time only for a moment. Spring was on the threshold, and after it would come the beautiful summer-time, a piping time of peace, when foxes may revel unpunished in robbery and misdeeds.

He rose at length with hatred in his glance, grinning with his white teeth towards the kennels, and he stood a while enjoying the hounds' concert, which they kept up for a long time.

At last he grew tired of it, and jogged off towards the hills, with the remains of the murdered cock in his mouth. He looked forward with gladness to the days of autumn, and vowed in his heart that he would know how to hold his own—he was ready to take up the struggle.

So he skipped away over the fields, with powerful elastic bounds, and vanished from sight.

VI

THROUGHOUT the whole spring and summer White-ear led a life of perfect bliss, and many were the visits he paid to the fowl-yard.

What difference did it make that Molly shut all the doors and gates she could see, to protect her hens and ducks? White-ear was too cunning for every one, and in course of time many were the hens he snatched and the ducks whose heads he bit off in the high reeds by the river.

All alike knew that it was White-ear who was at work, for he was easily recognisable by his peculiar marking, which had grown more pronounced as the years passed by.

Clicko had long since deserted her wonted place on the window-ledge, and now spent the whole of her time in the kennels with the hounds, where she felt in safety, for, Heaven knows, she was frightened out of her wits by this fox.

Buried deep down in the straw she sat, or rather lay, dreaming her everlasting dreams about India, the land of her birth ; and as the years went by, these dreams seemed to her more and more beautiful, and at last so wonderfully lovely that she often hoped that she might die while she sat dreaming like this, for Clicko believed that she would then fly straight into paradise.

So time passed on and summer drew to an end, and all with one accord hailed with gladness the coming of autumn.

The kennels awoke to life with the clamouring of hounds, and the horses stamped with impatience in their boxes and stalls, to come out and feel the soft turf of the hunting-field under their hoofs once more.

Autumn came creeping down from the moorlands, and breathed with clammy breath upon the dales. As far as eye could see lay yellowed fields, broken up by long strips of fresh-ploughed land, which divided the ground into irregular patches, some long and narrow, others shorter and broader. The trees stood naked, stripped to withstand the assaults of winter, and their leaves lay in withered heaps along the avenues, which gaped in the raw autumn fog.

Peter stood there contentedly taking in all these sure signs of the commencement of the hunting season—for to-day the first Meet of the year was to take place, and there was every prospect of a fine day and good sport.

Peter hoped that the hounds would find White-ear's scent, and he quivered with excitement at the bare thought of it.

However, the first day of hunting passed without the hounds finding the one fox whose life they would rather have had than those of several others. And weeks went by with the same result.

But as time went on and autumn advanced, it often happened that the hounds raced after a fox with such speed that the horses could scarcely keep them in sight, only to come to a sudden check, unable to follow the scent any farther.

Many had wondered at this phenomenon, which had recurred several times, but in spite of the most diligent search the scent had vanished, not to be found again.

But the hounds were more surprised than any one else to find themselves suddenly brought to a standstill, quite at a loss, and unable to hit upon any expedient for resuming the hunt of a fox which but a moment

since they had been following mute, so strong had been the scent.

Peter alone had his own suspicions as to who this fox could be, which tricked them all in so remarkable a manner.

He vowed in his heart that it must be White-ear—he even swore that he would give years of his life if he was mistaken.

And Peter was right. It really was none other than White-ear, who had now become an old fox—a fox who loved sport for its own sake, in the confident assurance that he was superior to both hounds and horses in speed and cunning.

White-ear had grown into a splendid specimen of a fox. He was unusually big, with a chest both deep and broad, and swelling muscles that rippled and played as he ran.

To this was added his extreme toughness, for which he had to thank the hard days when he had made the acquaintance of want, both in the lowlands and in the Western Highlands.

And then there came a day when White-ear felt unusually vigorous.

He lay basking in the feeble rays of the autumn sun on the edge of a little copse,

and, as he ruminated on his strange career, he grew arrogant and proud at the thought of all the difficult situations from which he had succeeded in escaping in so brilliant a manner.

Most of all his thoughts dwelt on how often he had cheated the hounds, so that they were quite at their wits' end.

He had no proper notion why so many people and horses and hounds sought the lives of foxes. Much as he had thought about it, he had never found any solution of the problem.

He had at last made up his mind—and he considered it quite natural too—that all living creatures strove after the lives of foxes; for this was, after all, only just what foxes did themselves to other living things. It was but eye for eye and tooth for tooth.

His thoughts then turned to the purely sporting side of the question, and he had to admit that he could imagine nothing more delightful than a gallop 'cross country on a clear autumn morning, or think of any greater joy than to see men, horses, and hounds stop in impotent perplexity, outwitted by his shrewdness.

Yes, it was a glorious sport after all, he

thought; and he stretched his muscular limbs luxuriously with a yawn.

It was now a good while since White-ear had fooled the hounds, and to-day he felt particularly in the mood for trying the chances of sport.

Afraid?—No, by heaven! he was not afraid, he snorted contemptuously, his nostrils quivering with emotion, for a tiny morsel of fear had stirred in his heart. It was the aftermath of that fathomless dread of the hounds which he had acquired in former days, and was now making its presence felt.

This terror had vanished in course of time, and made room for an insatiable hatred, although a faint suspicion of fear still lurked at the back of his mind.

He cocked his head attentively, and his right ear, with the white patch on it, strained listening up-wind. It was as though all his senses were concentrated in it.

He scented danger!

He was the incarnation of life and strength, and of intelligence too, as he stood spying towards the south, and stiffened all his muscles, which were tough with fighting and hardship, while his bushy tail with its white tip stretched straight out behind him.

‘Yes, let them come,’ he snorted in the arrogance of a boundless belief in his own strength, and, throwing back his head, he flattened his ears and drew up his nostrils into a furious snarl.

The feeble sun, busily engaged in dispersing the dense autumn mists that lay over the fields, cast his yellow rays upon White-ear’s fur and stained it a glittering gold.

And, look—the gentle sunshine drew aside the clammy autumnal coverlet that enveloped Mother Earth, the mists rose towards the sky, and there the morning clear and shining lay revealed.

White-ear jumped up suddenly with a start, for, as the fog lifted, he had caught sight of the pack of hounds in quick motion towards the very spot where he was standing—and in front of them all flew a peppery little fox-terrier, who kept rushing backwards and forwards, now to the right, now to the left.

It was not long before White-ear recognised the guardian of the Manor—for it really was our old friend Peter, who, in spite of his years, still took part in the hunts.

The next moment White-ear was flashing away in a southerly direction, where he knew he could find safety.

A howl in unison from the whole pack blended with the tramping of horses, and 'Tally-ho's' rang merrily over the fields, as Conqueror led his mates after the hated fox with the white ear.

White-ear headed the field in a long curve out over the meadows. He had plenty of time, and, thanks to his speed, had left his pursuers a good way behind him from the very start.

The hunt went away at racing speed—hedges and ditches, ploughed fields and meadows flew quickly past.

White-ear observed with satisfaction that the hounds were falling farther and farther astern, and he involuntarily slackened his pace to get his lungs in working order after the terrific spurt he had made at the outset.

The scent was good, for the hounds were running almost mute, and White-ear soon noticed by the thunder of hoofs that his enemies were drawing in upon him once more.

He turned his head and caught sight of the racing pack, who were forging ahead on a breast-high scent, so that the horses had a difficulty in keeping them in sight.

White-ear rushed away with powerful strides, and increased still more the distance between himself and his pursuers, showing as yet no signs of tiredness, for the fresh air and his hurried flight had but set his pulses dancing.

‘Pooh, they won’t catch me!’ he thought as he flew along; and now he came to a river, into which he jumped without hesitation, and so confident did he feel that he made straight for the opposite bank.

The hounds picked up the scent without losing a moment, and the hunt continued with undiminished heat.

White-ear made the pace still hotter, and fairly streaked across country.

Suddenly he made a sharp turn to the left and steered for a flock of sheep, thus to mislead the hounds.

White-ear observed with gratification that his trick had the desired effect, and he slowed down to a trot to regain his breath, for the run had been rather long and fast even for him.

He now began to meditate getting rid of his pursuers for good. By this time he had had enough exercise for a good while, he thought; so he shaped his course towards the woods, where he knew of a

place—an earth, under some huge oak-roots, with the most wonderful passages, from which they would never succeed in digging him out.

No sooner had White-ear started off in that direction than he heard the hounds give tongue nearer to him, so he put on speed and hastened his flight.

But his stride was no longer so elastic as before, and he did not breathe so regularly as he had done earlier, for the fun was beginning to last too long even for White-ear, and he marked that the hounds were closing in upon him.

Yet he was not in the least afraid. The sheltering earth lay not far away, and there he knew he would be secure.

But a fearful disappointment was in store for White-ear, for the earth-stopper had been out and blocked the entrance to the earth, of which he had been warned by the Master, who had lost more than one fox there.

So dismayed was White-ear at this surprise that he quite forgot his persecutors, until he suddenly found himself surrounded by them.

Nothing was left for him but to scramble up into a half-rotten oak tree which stood



‘The white-eared king of all thieves!’ snarled Conqueror.

close by, and there he sat with his heart in his mouth.

‘The white-eared fox, king of all thieves!’ snarled Conqueror, and leaped up against the tree, where White-ear sat looking down at his adversaries and grinding his teeth with rage and hatred.

‘At last we have got you, you murdering rogue,’ panted Conqueror, and all the other hounds voiced their assent in one unanimous howl, as they sprang up at White-ear, who, however, for the moment sat quite safe, while his brain was labouring feverishly to find some way of escape from the desperate position into which he had run.

But the only escape that White-ear saw was death, certain death.

Now that there seemed to be not a ray of hope, White-ear was overcome by an exquisite dread, which completely overshadowed his hatred.

He was out of his senses with fear, and began to shake until he was in peril of tumbling down.

Unconsciously he fell to begging for mercy and help, as all living things do when impotence numbs their faculties.

White-ear had now no hope to cling to, as he stood there screaming ever louder

and more wildly for pity and compassion. The hounds grew but the more furious at the comedy of it, and their cries for blood and vengeance deafened White-ear's prayers.

The Master and the whippers-in, followed by the hardest riders, now came up, and dismounted from their sobbing horses to watch the kill which seemed about to take place.

White-ear was now keeping perfectly quiet, and sat crouching in such a way that only the upper part of his head and his white ear were visible, as they moved quivering incessantly backwards and forwards. He was quite determined to protract the siege as much as possible, thinking perhaps that while there was life there was hope. It may have been this illusion that prevented him from jumping down into the jaws of death and putting an end to his agony.

Even when one of the whippers-in cracked his whip, and sent it whistling about his ears to make him come down, White-ear lay as still as ever. He had now, indeed, reached a point at which he was quite impervious to physical suffering, for mental torture had taken absolute possession of his nerves.

‘No, no. This isn’t fair. At any rate give him a chance—every one has a right to so much,’ sounded at last from one of the few riders who had at length managed to struggle up for the impending kill, and all the horses pricked their ears and thought this was a fair word, while the hounds protested in wild fury.

However, all the human beings thought it reasonable to give White-ear his chance.

The whips hissed and cracked in their efforts to drive back the hounds, but for once they did not seem to have very much effect.

The Master was actually on the verge of losing his authority over the pack, who, headed by Conqueror, made furious protests against such treatment.

In the end he succeeded, with the help of all who were present, in making himself master of the situation.

‘There is hope just as long as there is life,’ thought White-ear, who had been a joyful spectator of this tableau, and, whilst every one’s attention was turned towards it, he availed himself of the opportunity to vanish. . . .

Terror seemed to lend him wings, and for a brief space he really succeeded in

adding to his lead, for he could no longer even hear the thunder of the thudding horse-hoofs on the turf, and a spark of consolation was kindled in his breast.

The fact, however, was that the field, with very few exceptions, had ceased to follow the pack, so killing was the pace. White-ear's hope was, however, of short duration, for he marked how the hounds were coming nearer and nearer.

He now began to show fresh signs of tiring, and his breath came shortly and in jerks. He was hot with his long and hurried flight, and the white foam formed on his steaming loins. And just now, when he had need of all his wits and cunning, he was feeling so strangely confused—as though all his blood rushed throbbing to his head.

But he only ran and ran, insensible in his haste.

It was a bad look-out for White-ear, who was now running for dear life.

His tongue lolled out of his mouth, and his eyes glittered feverishly. He was drenched with foam, and his breath came in sobs, as he strained madly on.

The powerful fox-hounds were gaining on him steadily, loudly proclaiming their exultation at the impending triumph, and it

could not be long before the tragedy was played to an end.

And yet it seemed as though the hounds' triumphant chorus gave White-ear renewed strength to put forth a final effort, for he forged ahead once more and gained a little ground—but it was only for a moment or two: the hounds were overhauling him once again with their untiring and inexorable pursuit.

So hard put to it as he now was, White-ear had never felt before: so tired to death he had never been, even at the times when he was like to perish of hunger.

As he rushed blindly and dumbly along, he made many a sudden twist and turn in the most singular directions, for at such times his fancy seemed to inspire him with some proffered hope. Now it was a flock of sheep or herd of cattle that his senses conjured up so realistically: now it was the wonderful earth under the roots of the oak, with refuge-giving passages, which arose before him in its cheering form.

But, see—these were but phantom visions all, fearful in their elusiveness, seductive in their vividness, the fevered vapours of his heated brain, and there was naught but the monotonous fields, which stretched hope-

lessly before him for many and many a mile, devoting him to certain death.

White-ear felt that the end was at hand, that the time was now come when he, too, must lie down and die, although he had no clear conception that it was the law of retribution claiming its due—the law which inexorably exacts eye for eye and tooth for tooth, his life for the many innocent and happy lives he had taken in the course of years.

At these last moments of his flight, when muscles and sinews did their work quite mechanically, the whole of his restless, warring life flew past him in a flash.

But he indulged in no retrospections, incapable as he was of thought, for it was not only his muscles that worked like a machine with heated bearings—his senses, too, were clogged and unresponsive, the vital oils exhausted.

Suddenly a river barred all further flight, and White-ear plunged head foremost into its cold waters.

He swam a few strokes, but all at once his limbs refused their service.

White-ear's heart had burst, and, poor fellow, his struggles were at an end.

He sank slowly to the bottom, head first,

with fevered eyes half-closed, surrendering himself completely to dark, inexorable death.

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A few days later the carcass of a big fox was washed ashore not far from the Manor, and—it had a white ear.

VII

THE sun was sinking slowly in the west. Reluctantly he withdrew behind the lowering storm-clouds, which had gathered during the afternoon, dyeing them scarlet and purple. He cast his watery ray over the moorlands, where a string of horses and a pack of hounds were painfully wending their way homeward.

‘My goodness, that was a stiff bit of work!’ thought black Iris with the white star on her beautiful forehead, as she plodded, aching and sore-footed, along by the side of her owner, who was no less tired than she was.

In such a hunt as this she had never in her born days taken part; still, there was one thing to be glad for, and that was that she had at any rate been among the first horses to come up with the hounds, and she heaved a deep sigh of resignation.

The hounds were dissatisfied both with

themselves and with the world at large ; for there had been no lack of hard blows that day, scattered over the whole country as they had been in their efforts to follow their leader Conqueror ; and the worst of it all was that in the end there had been no kill, in spite of the supernatural exertions of both men and animals.

But the most disconsolate person of all was Conqueror himself, for he was not merely in a bad temper, he was absolutely furious, and walked along cursing and growling to himself all the time. He was left to walk alone, because none of the other hounds felt very enthusiastic about keeping him company when the wind was in that quarter.

Soon after the home-stables were reached night fell with storm and rain, and every one was glad to be under shelter.

Men and animals fell at last into an uneasy slumber, and once more went through all the happenings of that fatiguing day in dreams, which were life-like in their distinctness and wealth of detail.

The banks of storm-clouds that had appeared on the horizon fulfilled their threat, bringing with them both wind and rain, and towards dawn the storm increased

in violence until it was little short of a hurricane.

It tugged and strained at all that came in its way, and rushed shrieking over the Manor. In the stables here and there a horse rose to his feet, shaking himself free from sleep, whilst the hounds in the kennels vented their discomfort in long-drawn howls, which strove to drown the howling of the gale.

Peter came marching thoughtfully and meditatively through the stables, but this morning he seemed strangely absent-minded. He thought over the happenings of the preceding day, and he was constrained to admit that it seemed quite hopeless ever to dream of getting hold of the culprit ; for he now felt perfectly convinced that it was no real fox at all, but rather some supernatural being in the shape of a fox.

He had once heard Clicko say that there existed beings like this from another world, who bore the shapes of animals—although Clicko had obstinately refused at the time to go more deeply into the question.

Peter halted by Iris, for whom he had quickly formed an attachment, in spite of the fact that she only paid short visits at the stables now and then.

After standing for a time looking at the black mare, he finally enquired whether she believed in supernatural beings.

But Iris only turned her bonny head and looked like one big question-mark, resting the while now on her right, now on her left back leg, as she had been doing nearly all night through, for her limbs were aching and tender from the day before.

She consoled herself, however, with the thought that she was not alone in her trouble. Even Tom, who, in spite of his years, was known for one of the toughest horses in the stable, had stood all night stamping with all four feet, he ached so after the long gallop.

No, she understood nothing of the whole matter, Iris assured him repeatedly, and shook her head ; whereupon Peter continued his way along the passage right up to the iron railing that separated the stables from the outer part of the kennels—which, by the way, was roofed in—and here he stood still and barked in the hope of attracting Conqueror's attention.

It took a long time before Conqueror at last showed himself, cross and sleepy, and asked what he wanted. . . .

But Peter really didn't know exactly

what he wanted—he only enquired how Conqueror felt, and the talk fell quite naturally upon the last hunt, which was, in fact, what was occupying both his own and Conqueror's mind.

They came at length to the conclusion that this fox with the white ear could be no real fox, for he had vanished as though swallowed up by earth and water, and must have accomplices in the very elements of nature. And this they both believed, as did all their mates and the whole stable of horses, even including Clicko the wise—until a few days later, when something happened which will bring this story to a conclusion.

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It was a hazy morning. The rain grew in strength till it fell from the sky in sheets, and the river, which at other times flowed so stilly and quietly past the Manor, with its dark secrets fast locked up in its concealing waters, swelled into a torrent that laid its treasures bare ; and one of these was the carcass of a big fox, which the river had taken in its embrace and hidden in one of its silent eddies near the bottom, where the poor fox was whirled about in an ice-cold tomb.

By reason of the great volumes of water

the seal of this sepulchre was broken, and its occupant floated out of the icy coldness farther and farther away, and came at last to Mother Earth, whence the river's chilly fingers strove in vain to pluck him back to its bosom.

The body remained where it had stranded, and was swirled back and forth, back and forth, until a little dog came and caught sight of it, and this dog was our little chum Peter, who was everywhere at once, as we know.

At first he didn't know what to think of it—and, when he went nearer to it, he knew still less what to make of the thing he saw. In short, he made off with his tail between his legs, and not before he had induced Conqueror to join him did he get a rational thought into his little head.

Although Conqueror at the first moment was just as surprised as Peter, and knew no more than Peter what he should think of what he saw there, nevertheless, they ventured in company to make a closer survey of the strange thing that was heaving backwards and forwards against the bank, and they ended by laying hold of it, with the result that their astonishment became still greater when they discovered that it was a

fox—a big, strong fox, whose like they had never seen—and, strange to say, it had a white ear.

In wild triumph they came home with their find, and dragged it into the stables, where they left it lying right in the middle of the floor, thereby almost frightening Clicko to death, as she sat above Iris dreaming her endless dreams.

She burst into a wild screech of terror, and her breast heaved violently. In short, she received such a shock on this occasion, that she fell asleep for ever one night not many days later, and tumbled straight on to Iris's head, vanishing into the kingdom of her dreams, where the trees were so tremendously big, and the flowers so red and yellow, and where there were so many other cockatoos with whom she was friends. . . .

Consumption had gained the upper hand after all !

So the mystery of White-ear's disappearance was cleared up in spite of everything, and it was Peter who found him.

The body was thrown into the coach-house, and the strange part of it was that it lay there on the same spot as Mother Fox had lain that afternoon when she was killed by Dreadnought and Peter.

In wild triumph they came home with their find.





That evening there was a full moon, which cast its pale beam upon White-ear, as he lay there grinning with his white teeth, resting on his sins—sins so scarlet and unpardonable that even his own mother's misdeeds paled before them, as the feeble ray of the moon pales before the brilliant light of the sun.

But perhaps even White-ear would find mercy before the eternal judge—no one can tell—for every one's hand had been against him ; and even among the animals, his own kindred, the poor fellow had not had a single friend.

This fact will at any rate throw a certain light of comprehension over his burdensome life, from which death came to him as a great release. . . .

White-ear was flayed, and his skin hung up in the kennels, but although it was hung so high that his bushy tail actually brushed the roof, his head still reached half-way down the wall, and the hounds used to practise which of them could jump the highest, the goal being the white ear.

Even death could not quench the hatred of his enemies—the marks of their teeth bore witness to that.

At last his right ear—for that was the

one which had once been white—hung in tatters and shreds down over the cold stone wall. Far up on his back were also marks as of hounds' teeth, but these were the scars left by the eagle's talons that summer night in the Scottish Highlands, for hair had never grown there since then.

This incident with White-ear caused Peter to think a little more deeply than he had done before.

He began to grow more understanding, and gained an insight into life which he had lacked hitherto.

He learned to look at everything with different eyes, and to realise how many there are who have much to battle with, much sorrow and much pain to labour under in life, so that he could not always measure their lives by the same standard as his own.

These thoughts streamed in upon him more particularly when he stood in the kennels under White-ear's skin—for how much had not *he* had to cope with?—Had life, for him, ever borne any other aspect than of one long struggle to live, inordinate in its brutality, from beginning to end?

So Peter's eyes were opened to the fact that there were but few who were so well



off as he was himself, and that no thanks were due to him for being the nice, well-behaved dog every one said he was.

But it was also made quite plain to him that through all life there ran a law of retribution, adamant in its consistency and application, a law which had claimed its due of White-ear, whose whole life, from beginning to end, had but spread sorrow and despair among others.

Peter heard afterwards that human beings call this law 'Lex Talionis,' and that it forms only one little part of the supreme law of the universe, the law of laws, whose might extends over all things in life and in death, and whose shaping forces date from the grey dawn of time.

But this law itself is so immeasurable that no human name may room it, for it belongs to the Deity, which was its source.

POSTSCRIPT

IT would be sheer ingratitude on my part not to inform my readers that this book owes its existence to Clicko the cockatoo.

An acquaintance formed more or less by accident brought about my presence at the Manor, and there I was introduced to her. I won her confidence with a lump of sugar, which I had originally intended for one of the horses, but she did not disclose her fund of wisdom and her multitude of strange experiences before I had robbed the sugar-basin a good many times, and, even then, she made me promise not to publish her reminiscences until after her death — a reservation which notabilities usually make.

I am personally acquainted with most of the animals at the Manor. Pretender I have ridden to many a hunt; several of the brushes that hang above my writing-table belonged to foxes that were found by Dreadnought; and Peter, of course, is

a great chum of mine. But White-ear, who plays so great a part in this tale, I have never met in real life, and Clicko must bear all responsibility for his strange history.

On reading through my MS. I did not quite know whether I dared publish these stories of Clicko's—there was so much in them that struck me as very extraordinary, especially the chapters about White-ear—so I induced Peter to look carefully through what I had written. He, too, was inclined to be sceptical about some points, and thought more particularly that it was a long way for a fox to roam right to the Scottish Highlands.

But when I informed him, in support of the story, that at this point Clicko had tapped on the window three times with her beak, to emphasise the truth of what she was saying, there no longer remained a shadow of doubt in Peter's mind.

He assured me that Clicko was a quite extraordinarily knowing bird ; she was even wiser and more truthful than human beings. ' And as to one or two little embellishments, I shall not be too hard upon them ; for you can't expect a cockatoo to have the same liking for plain, unvarnished facts as dogs

and human beings,' he added, and regarded me with a doubting eye.

'However . . . I have something in my mind that I want to do,' continued Peter, after a moment's reflection, 'but you must promise me to write about it whilst I am alive, so that every one can see what kind of a dog I am.'

When Peter had received my promise he vanished in the direction of the stables, to make his usual evening round of inspection.

Dusk had already fallen, and the moon was peeping over the hill-tops with round, astonished eye, for she had heard every word Peter said, and was wondering how far Clicko's poetic licence had carried her.

But at heart she was sorry she had never learned to read.

THE END



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