

THE HISTORY
OF
ONE DAY — OUT OF
SEVENTEEN
THOUSAND.



BY
Judge Nutting.

S K
33

.N98

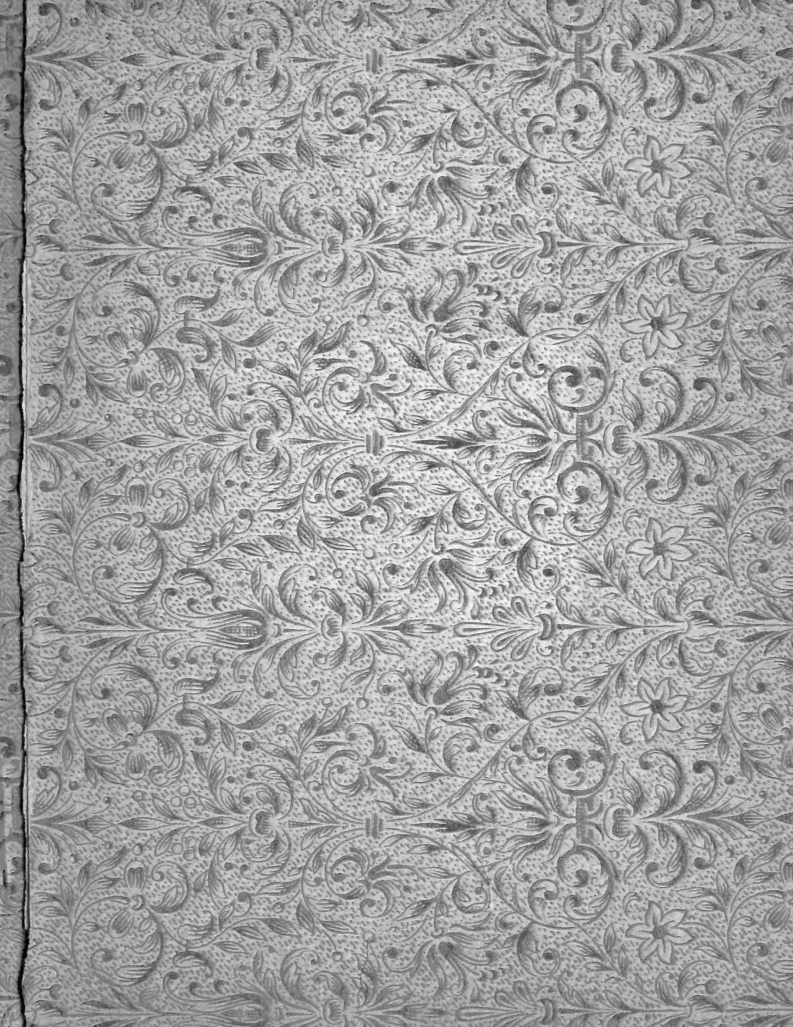


LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. ^{SK 33} Copyright No.

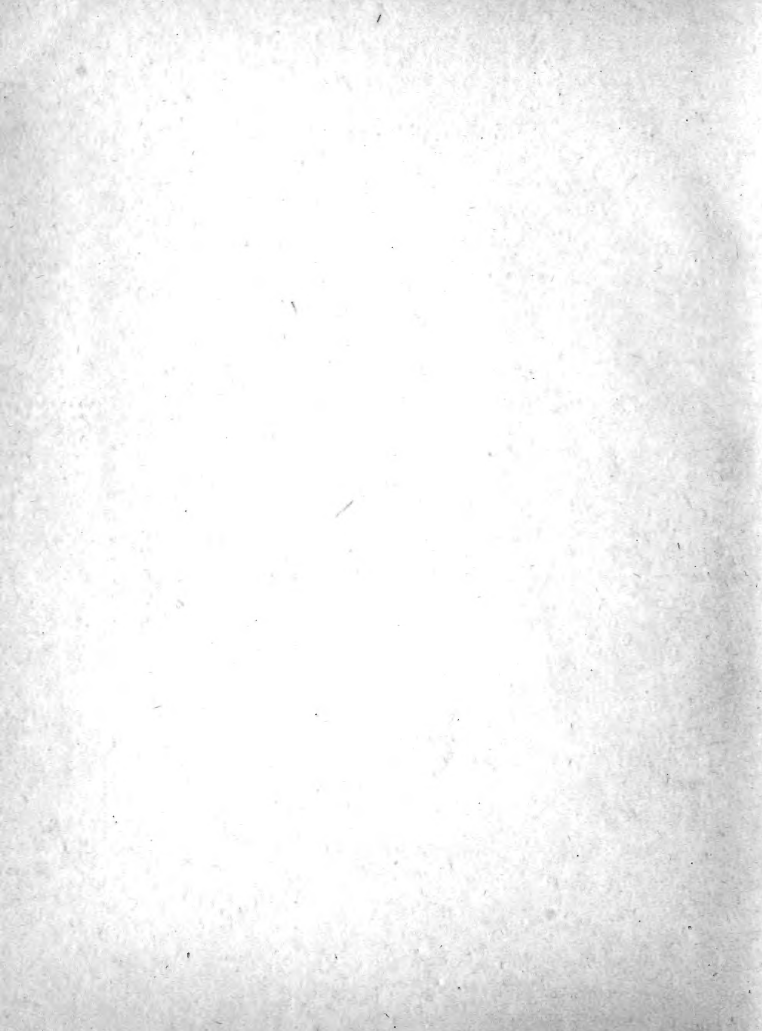
Shelf. N98

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.









THE HISTORY
OF
ONE · DAY · OUT · OF
SEVENTEEN THOUSAND,

BY

Newton W.
JUDGE NUTTING.
" "



15
9544

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CAROLINE S. KING.

OSWEGO, N. Y. :
R. J. OLIPHANT, PRINTER AND STATIONER.
1889.

37595
W

SK 33

N 98

THE OLD PILL-LOCK GUN

And How I Killed my First Partridge.



I WAS a farmer's boy and lived on the old farm where I was born. This old homestead, the dearest spot in all the world to me, was about midway between Lake Ontario and Oneida Lake. A swift running spring-brook, called "South Branch of Little Salmon," formed the southern boundary of the farm for the distance of a hundred rods or more. Our house stood upon a hill, and the farm of over a hundred acres took in not only the hill but the interval land commencing at the foot and stretching southward to the creek above named. The farther bank of that beautiful stream was

father's south line for a long distance. This interval we called the "Flat." It was a beautiful piece of land, easy of tillage and exceedingly fertile.

When I was a boy ten years of age, October, 1850, this part of the town of West Monroe was comparatively a new country. The original forests still covered a large part of that section. Indeed, my father's farm was surrounded with woods. Several small farms, and two as large as father's, were in the same clearing, but you could stand on the hill near our house and look about you to every point of the compass and your vision would meet the large trees of maple, birch, beech and hemlock which had been there for centuries. On a clear day this was a beautiful landscape; woods all about you, with here and there a neighbor's house, barn and apple orchard in sight; and at one point, away southward, you could plainly see the glistening waters of the "South Branch."

We lived in a large, wood-colored house, with two wings. It had a big chimney, which was so placed as to accommodate the whole house. This chimney reached far above the highest point of the roof. At the top the flue was as large as the head of a big barrel. It reached to the kitchen, where there was an immense fire-place. It reached to the square room, or parlor, where there was a smaller fire-place, and it reached to the guest's bedroom where there was a still smaller fire-place. So, in fact,

this chimney had a large base and in it were the three fire-places.

The old kitchen was the place for fun in winter time. Sometimes when the weather was cold and stormy we would trim the kitchen fire-place with evergreens. These would not last long, but would make the great blazing fire look very nice for a time. When the wind howled and the snow filled the air at night we would put a huge, round, solid beech, birch or maple log in the fire-place for a "back-log." This would be a foot and a half through and seven or eight feet long. You should have seen the fire we could build with such a log for a starter. We would pile on the hard wood chips and splinters, pieces of birch bark and sometimes pine knots. The fire would reach far up the chimney and would roar and crackle at a great rate. The whole kitchen, to the farthest corner, would be thoroughly warmed and lighted by it.

The kitchen was very large, and had a big, square post, painted red, standing in the center. The games and pranks we played about this old post, at these times, still linger in my memory like the aroma of flowers.

I commenced this story, however, to tell you about the "Old Pill-lock Gun," and the first partridge I ever killed.

My father had two guns at this time. One was a

single-barrelled fowling piece, which would weigh about six pounds and a half. Its stock was old, and did not fit very well. It had a round, bronzed barrel, and it was a curious fire-arm, you may be sure. It would shoot like the mischief, when properly loaded, however. Father had killed many a fine bag of game with it in days gone by.

The old "Pill-lock" was the most striking and curious thing about this gun. The cylinder that went into the barrel at the breech, was like that of any muzzle-loading gun, except, perhaps, it was a trifle larger. In the place of the nipple, which, in a cap lock, receives the percussion cap, there was a hole in the top of the cylinder. The lock and hammer were like those in an ordinary gun, except that the hammer was pointed at the end, and the point fitted into the hole in the cylinder. The firing percussion was in the shape of a pill, about the size of the small, round sugar pills, used by doctors to cure sick people, and these pills were black, and were kept and carried in a goose quill. When the gun was loaded, we were careful to see that the powder, which had been put in the gun, came in sight in the hole in the cylinder, and then we took one of the little black pills from the goose quill, and put it in the hole so that it would rest on the bottom, where the point of the hammer would strike it, and create the fire that reached the powder in the gun, and explode the charge.

There was another gun, which was called the "smooth bore." It had a shorter and thicker barrel, and had once been a rifle. It had been bored out, and would now shoot either shot or a large ball. This gun had a better stock, which reached clear to the muzzle. It was fitted with a cap lock, and was considered, by all who had ever seen it shoot, a first-class gun.

The two guns hung in the kitchen, side by side, on wooden hooks, which had been made by father, from crooked branches of a tree, and nailed to the ceiling. These two guns were loaded, as a rule, the year 'round.

Father knew, very well, how to care for a gun, and how to shoot both rifle and shot-gun. He had moved to the old farm when it, and the surrounding country, were covered with forests. The woods were then full of bears, deer, wolves and other animals, and he had learned to handle a gun, and shoot, as well from necessity as pleasure. Father was a young man then, and now his hair and beard had begun to turn gray. It was, even now, a very dangerous thing for a hawk to attempt to make a dinner of our chickens when father was about. Nine times out of ten the hawk would pay the penalty of his daring with his life.

The deer and bears had been driven away and killed off, and father's love for hunting had to be satisfied by capturing smaller game. He loved to hunt partridges

when the fall came on and the farm work had been finished. When the potatoes had been dug and put away in the cellar; when the apples had been carefully picked and barrelled for winter; when the corn had been husked and piled in a great yellow heap in the crib, and when the wood for winter had been housed, then it was that the old hunting fever came on and the partridge, woodcock and squirrel had to hide carefully or they were gone.

For two or three years in the fall, father had let me go with him on these hunting trips. I had not been allowed to carry a gun, though I fairly ached to do so. When I first commenced to go on these hunting trips, I was so small that father some times helped me over large logs, piles of brush and muddy places. I had fired the old pill-lock gun a few times to scare the crows from the corn or at a flock of pigeons passing over, but I had as yet only learned the a, b, c of gun lore. With my limited experience and few years, I was on this October morning to have a gun fully loaded and was to commence hunting in earnest. Father had told me this while caring for the chores that very morning. When breakfast time came and we all sat about the table, I found that my appetite had failed; the excitement, caused by the expected hunt, had taken away the desire for food. My father had noticed this and said, "Young man, you must eat a good breakfast so that you will be strong for the tramp," and in obedience I managed to follow the advice.

Breakfast was over and yet the sun was hardly in sight over the tall trees on the highlands to the eastward. The dew which had gathered during the night, still glistened among the grasses of the low lands like diamonds, when I heard father whistle for "Snap," a beautiful little spaniel, who came bounding and barking into the house. Father reached up and lifted the "Old Pill-lock Gun" off the hooks and carefully placed it in my hands. I shall never forget the feelings of pride and happiness which swept over me as I took that gun.

Father said, "There is a gun, loaded with death and destruction. You are to be a hunter in earnest to-day. I have lost my boy to carry game, but I have found a brave hunter." As he said this his face lighted up with a smile and he reached up and took from the hooks the smooth bore.

Just as we were about to go, I heard my mother's voice calling me; I found her in the square room about her household duties. I went up to her and she put one hand on one side of my face and the other hand on the other side and kissed me. As she did this, she said "Be careful now and not hurt yourself or your father, and bring me a partridge of your own killing, and I will see that it is cooked fit for a king."

My mother was tall and straight, and had dark hair and large, dark gray eyes. She was a beautiful woman,

and as good, loving and patient as she was beautiful. God bless, keep and guard her down to the end, for she yet lives at nearly eighty. I will, perhaps, tell you more about her some other time.

I passed out of the door, and as I did I saw father standing in the road with the butt of his gun resting on the ground and he was gazing off over the eastern hills. We started in the direction he was looking, across the meadow and pasture land of a neighbor. We looked for no gates or bars, but we went right on over the fences when they came in our way. We paid no attention to roads or paths; we made our own roads and paths. The dog "Snap" ran here and there, happy as a lark and handsome as a picture. He loved to hunt as well as father or I. He was a long-eared, curly-haired, liver-colored Spaniel, and was well trained and exceedingly intelligent. In memory, I can see father now as he walked along on that beautiful morning. He was six feet and an inch in height, and weighed about one hundred and seventy pounds and was as straight as an arrow. His complexion was dark; his nose long and straight; his eyes were as sharp as an eagle's; his hair curled a little; his hands and feet were small and well shaped, and he stepped as spry and light as a fox. He sleeps the long, last sleep now, but I remember him so well that I know I have given you a good description of him.

We soon came near the woods, and words are feeble agents with which to describe how beautiful the leaves and branches were as they stood out between the sky and us. The early frosts had here and there touched the foliage and in obedience to that touch, there appeared the beautiful colorings seen in a western New York forest in Autumn.

Just before we reached Hess' sugar bush father said: "You must always carry your gun so the muzzle points away from any one who is with you and also away from yourself. Then if it should accidentally be discharged no one will be hurt. When you are in the woods, you must guard against the hammer of your gun being pulled back by coming in contact with bush or vine, as I once knew a gun to be discharged and do mischief in that way."

We had now reached the underbrush which fringed the woods. This was an old blackberry patch and a beautiful hide for partridges. Father said to the dog, "Go hunt them up." The spaniel disappeared like a flash. We stepped into and through the brush and briars to the forest of tall sugar maples. The ground was covered with fallen leaves, and the ferns, which had been sheltered from the frost by the branches and leaves overhead, still were very beautiful and graceful as they bowed now and then in the morning breeze.

The dog was at work in the brush skirting the woods. We kept along opposite the dog as near as we could. We

knew where he was by the small dry twigs which were broken as he ran here and there. Father said, "If there are any birds in there, he will rustle them out sure, and if any birds are flushed they will fly out of the brush by us and down the hill to our left to find a hiding place among the branches of those hemlocks you can just see by the borders of 'Benson's creek.' If we are quick and sharp when the birds pass us, we shall get one or two. If we are not lucky enough to shoot them on the wing, we will try and hunt them up after they have secreted themselves among the branches of the trees."

Sure enough, as we were walking along with our eyes and ears ready to catch the first sight or sound from the bushes, we heard the dog jump and give a series of sharp barks or screams. At once there was a great flutter of wings and up out from the bushes came three partridges, one after the other. They were as big as good sized chickens and like a flash they started across our path and down the hill towards the hemlock. I forgot I had a gun, but with eyes strained, looked after the birds as they went by like the wind. Not so with father. He stood a little to the left of me and in the direction the birds were going. The tall, graceful ferns came up to his knees. His left foot was a little in advance of the other; his gun was to his face just a moment and I saw the end of the smooth bore following the course of the birds. Just a

moment, a mere item of time, and there was a flash and a roar and off to our left I heard a "thud" as one of the birds caught by the shot from the gun fell in the leaves.

I first thought of my gun just as the bird father had killed struck the ground. But it was too late. My chance had passed for that time.

My father was as handsome as a picture as he stood there and loaded the old smooth bore. His face was slightly flushed and an exquisite smile lighted up his usually sober face. I noticed his hand when he loaded the gun and it was as steady as could be, but the fire of excitement burned in his keen eye.

The dog brought the partridge in his mouth and laid it at father's feet and looked up into his face, whined a little and moved his tail, saying plainly in dog language, "You are the lad for me." The spaniel never noticed me at all, he no doubt blamed me because I had not killed one of the birds. Any way he acted very coolly towards me.

Father lifted the partridge by the bill. It was a father bird and had a beautiful black ruffle of feathers about his neck. He had a tail which, when spread, was as large as a lady's fan and of the same shape. The feathers of the tail were very beautiful; each one was black at a point near the end, though the very end was light colored, so that when the tail was spread there was a border all the

way round the tail, and also a light border all the way round at the end of the feathers. The feathers on the body of the bird were mottled white and black, so perfectly mingled that the color was neither white or black. Light colored feathers grew away down the legs to the feet and the feet were like a chicken's, except they were black or very dark colored. It was a noble bird and no mistake.

Father said, "There my boy, that is the way to do it, why didn't you kill one?" I owned up that I had been so excited that I had forgotten my gun until the birds had gone and, in fact, till his bird struck the ground. He said, "Well never mind, you have not been in the habit of shooting and it is no wonder you forgot your gun the first time, you will soon get used to it, however, and then you will give a good account of yourself." Father put the bird in his hunting sack, which hung over one shoulder, and we started on down the hill in the direction the other birds had gone.

These birds are very cunning in the way they will hide from a hunter in a tree. They usually light on an evergreen because it gives better opportunity to secrete themselves. They light on a limb, high up, and sit close to the body of the tree. They sit very straight and still. It takes a sharp eye to find them when thus hidden.

We went down among the hemlocks and looked every

one over carefully, but could not see a feather. We walked round each tree and examined it the best we could and finally gave it up and passed beyond the trees down to the margin of the brook which here ran over a pebbly bottom. Just as we reached the water we heard a rustle and flutter of wings up toward one of the hemlocks we had passed and examined, and out jumped one of the partridges we had looked for. She flew right back toward the spot she had started from. The dog pricked up his ears and whined and father said, "Never mind we will let her go; she is so frightened that she would fly again before we could get in gun shot of her if we attempted to look her up."

We passed down the creek a little ways until we found some stones which came above the surface of the water, on which we could cross the stream dry shod. I was thirsty and spoke of taking a drink of the water from the brook, but father told me to wait a little while and he would show me a spring from which I could satisfy my thirst. Just as we reached the other side of the stream I saw some tracks in the soft soil near the water. I called my father's attention to them and asked what they were and he said, "They are the tracks of a coon, these tracks were made last night; he went to the corn-field after soft corn, or perhaps he was looking along here after clams." The tracks looked liked a medium sized dog's tracks, only

they were long and slim and you could see the nails were sharp. I asked father if we could not hunt the coon up. He said, "It would be a very difficult thing to find him as he is now no doubt secreted a long distance from here in the hollow of some tree asleep, and will not stir out again till night."

We went on, over a beech ridge, and down into a ravine. As we came near the bottom, I heard the musical sound of running water. A few paces further down we stepped around a bush of alders, and there, just before us, was a boiling spring, as big as a dining-table. The water bubbled up from a dozen places in the bottom, and though the water in the spring was quite deep, you could see the smallest particle on the bottom—it was so clear. I was about to kneel, and drink of the clear, sparkling waters. Father told me to wait a moment, and he stood his gun beside a tree, and stepped a few paces away. When he returned, he had two large leaves of the basswood tree. He handed me one, and then took the other, and, with a few movements of the fingers, fashioned the leaf into a drinking cup, somewhat like a cornucopia. He stooped down, and carefully filled it part full of the sweet water of the spring, and held it to my lips, and I drank from it what now seems the sweetest draught that I ever tasted. Father smiled, and cast the leaf from him; took the other from my hand and made a second cup, and himself drank heartily.

He then picked up his gun, and was about to start on, but he stopped, lowered the gun, and stood and gazed long and silently upon the waters of the spring. He looked like a piece of statuary, as he stood there—the woods all about, and the beautiful spring just in front of him. I asked him what he was thinking about. He started, and looked at me, and said, “It is thirty years since the first time I saw that spring. I was twenty-one years of age, and these waters bubbled up and ran away, just as they do now. All these years has this spring been noiselessly sending forth to the world that same life-giving water. It never gets weary, nor does it stop for a moment in its good work. The Divine Being, to whom we are all accountable, and who guides us all our lives, if we will let him, furnishes the fountain somewhere in the hills. This spring, my boy, should teach us a lesson in life. It should teach us that the things that come from God’s hands are pure and clean. It should teach us not to stop in our efforts to do our fellow-men good. It should teach us to do acts of love without show or noise. It does tell us that God has provided, and will provide for all the beings dependent upon him.”

He had forgotten, and I am sure I had, where we were. But just at this time the dog ran down the stream a little and looked up and barked, and we saw, on looking over his head, a black squirrel about to jump from the top of

one tree to another. Father said, "Shoot him just as he stops to gather for the leap." Up went the old "Pill-lock," and as the squirrel was about to jump I fired at him. My! how the old gun kicked and smoked. When the smoke had cleared away, no other execution had been done except to detach a few leaves from the branches of the trees overhead by the shot, which came circling to the ground. I also found that a small piece of the skin from my right cheek had been loosened. The squirrel, as lively as a cricket, had now gone to the body of the tree and concealed himself away up toward the top. We could not see him for he kept very still. Father said, "He is on the other side of the trunk, and will keep the body of the tree between himself and us if he can. You walk round that side of the tree, and as you come in sight so he can see you, he will come around on this side, and, before he knows it, I shall get a shot at him." So I walked around the tree, and as I came nearly opposite father, I saw him raise his gun quickly. I looked away up in the tree, and saw the squirrel run out on the end of a branch toward another tree. He stopped a moment to get ready to jump and father fired. I heard a sharp, cutting sound as the shot sped on its way, and then saw the leaves and bark about the squirrel fly, and the squirrel dropped off the limb. He did not come down, however; he hung by his paws to the limb a moment, his



long, bushy tail hanging straight. I was about to fire, but was stopped by my father's saying, "Don't shoot; he is dead enough and will come down soon." Just then his paws loosened and he fell through the lower branches to the leaves at our feet.

The dog was about to pounce upon him, but father stopped him and went and picked him up. He held him in his hand and smoothed his black hair and long, bushy tail. It was a beautiful animal, as black as coal, long, slender body, strong limbs and paws, a cunning head, with long, slim front teeth, and cute ears that stood straight out from his head. He had long hairs at the side of his mouth like the hairs about a cat's mouth we call "whiskers." His tail was as long as his body and covered to the tip with beautiful black hair. He would weigh two pounds and a half. Father put him away in his game bag with the partridge, loaded his gun and on we started.

In a very short time we came to the main stream of that part of the country, called "South Branch." It is quite a large stream. It is two or three rods across, and runs still and deep at this point. It is the same stream that passes to the south of our house. As we came to the water, father stopped and said, "Just across the creek, there, in that low ground among the elms, we sometimes find a wood-cock, even at this time of the year.

The most of these birds go south before this, but, now and then, one stays till nearly the first of November. We will go down to a log, which reaches across the stream just below here, and go over and see if the dog cannot find one of these beautiful and curious birds." So we walked down along the margin of the still-running stream, a little way, and, sure enough, there we found an old, moss-covered log, reaching from bank to bank. It looked as if it had been there for many years, as, no doubt, it had. Father carried both guns, as we crossed. We reached the other side safely, though I took the pains to hang on to the alders that came within my reach, on the way over. If wood-cock could be found in this cover, they would be along the margin of the stream, in the thick alders. So father stationed me a little way from the spot where we stepped upon the shore. I stood between two great elm trees, that were about two rods apart. I faced up the stream, and, at the suggestion of father, I cocked my gun. Father and the dog took a roundabout way, up the creek, keeping some distance from the water. They went twenty-five or thirty rods, and then turned to the left, and went to the margin of the creek. I heard father say, "Look them up," to the dog. Then it was that every sense I had was on the alert. I heard father and the dog come along down the creek, and when they had reached about half way to me

the dog gave one of his sharp, warning barks. I saw a puff of smoke in the thick brush, and then heard the report of the "smooth bore," and in half a second the shot rattled in the branches of the elm over my head. Just then my eye caught sight of the bird coming right toward me. The old "Pill-lock" was to my face in an instant, and, taking a quick aim, I fired. The next thing I remember I was picking myself up out of the leaves. The old "Pill-lock" lay at my side, smoking from the muzzle, as innocent as could be, but it had downed me.

Father was near me and reached down his hand and grasped mine and helped me up, and, as he did so, he said, "Did you kill the bird?" While he asked the question, he rubbed his hand along my right arm, and said, "No bones broken, let us look for the bird." I picked up the old gun, and father loaded it, and we started to search for the game. I noticed father did not look as though he expected to find anything, and I confess I felt that way myself. After a little, father inquired where the bird was when I fired. I told him, as near as I could, and also stated the course the bird was flying. I told father that I did not see the bird after I fired, but I first saw smoke, and lots of it, and then I saw stars, and many of them, and that was all I recollected about it. The bird was somewhere, however, dead or alive, and, with the dog, we set about find-

ing it. We started slowly down the stream, the way the bird was flying when I fired.

We had not gone far when father called to me to come where he was. When I reached him, he pointed his finger and said: "Do you see that little bushy hemlock near that pool of water? Well, look along down its stem to the ground and then to the left near that old dark colored chunk of wood." I did as I was told, and there, not more than a rod from us, sat the wood-cock with his long bill, his big round eyes and long legs. I started to pull up my gun but father put his hand on the barrel and said, "You are too near, you will spoil the bird to shoot it from here." So we stepped back about three rods and then father said, "Shoot now." I raised the old "Pill-lock" and put it fairly against my shoulder, took quick aim and fired. As the smoke cleared away we walked up and there lay the bird dead. I had taken him on the ground to be sure, but I had taken him.

Let me give young hunters a bit of advice right here about wood-cock shooting. When you get a chance to kill a wood-cock, kill him. Don't insist on his being on the wing when you shoot at him, if you do perhaps you won't shoot him, that's all.

I felt pretty well. I had a wood-cock and father had a partridge and a squirrel. Father offered to carry my bird, but I respectfully and firmly declined. I carefully

tucked the bird away in the pocket of my home-made blouse. My step was light and easy after that. I was a full fledged hunter and with a record at that. The record was short, but it was a record.

We now re-crossed the creek on the same log we had used as a bridge when we came over, and started toward home, but not over the route we had come. We went toward what was then known as "Dick's slash." This was forty or fifty acres of land that once had been original forest and had been "slashed" or cut over and again partly covered with underbrush and was a favorite place for partridges. We started down the creek and kept near it. We soon came to the roots of a white birch which branched out from the tree on the surface of the ground so that they made an excellent seat.

It was now a little after mid-day and father leaned his gun against the birch, where it was within reach, and sat down upon the root. I sat down near him and laid my gun on the ground beside me. We were perhaps two rods from the creek, but in sight of it. Father took his hunting bag off his shoulder and, much to my surprise, took from it a bundle, carefully done up in brown paper. He undid the string and spread out on the clean bark of the root a luncheon. I did not know he had such a thing. I tell you it looked good. There was dried beef, chicken sandwiches, fried cakes, boiled eggs, a little paper of salt

and pepper mixed, and some bread and butter all prepared and the pieces put together. It was as neat and clean, seemingly, as when he had taken it from home.

We ate of the luncheon for a little and I said that some water would be agreeable, and at once started for the creek. "Hold on," said my father, "That is pretty good water but don't drink it. Go out there where you see that old tree top and by the rock just beyond you will find a spring. You might as well know where these things are first as last. As you go along look close and you will find a small gourd shell hanging in the tree top by a wire loop." I followed directions and found the shell and the moss-covered rock at the foot of a birch and from under the rock, and from crevices in it, came sweet water in abundance. I filled the gourd and drank all I wanted and again filled it and carried it to father. He drank and then held the cup and looked at it and the sparkling water in it and drank again and again. I asked how the gourd came there and was told that many years before it had been brought there on purpose by father so that he could catch the cool water as it dripped from the moss, and that it had been there ever since. We set about finishing our lunch, at times feeding the spaniel from our hands, who ate, and drank from the creek alternately.

My father said, "You seem to enjoy this my boy, it

is natural you should. This is your first real hunt, you are just commencing, and my hunts are fast coming to an end. You see your sun of life always in the *east* and the journey of life to you seems to be a long one. I see my sun of life always in the *west* and the journey of life seems short. Life is a curious state. You cannot comprehend it and you will never be able to explain it to yourself even. You are now about ten years of age. Before you realize it you will be fifty and when you are fifty, I will sleep my last sleep. My labors and cares in life are drawing to a close, yours are just commencing. You will find this life that now looks so pleasant and rosy to you, unsatisfactory. You will long for something beyond, and there is something worth longing for after this life is passed. I can't express to you how anxious I am that you should choose the right way and the "better part." There are stumbling blocks and dangerous places along the journey of life and you must find them and pass them safely. I know where some of these dangerous places are, for I have stumbled there. I will tell you about a few of them now and about others at some future time.

You have been on journeys with me and have noticed when we came to a point on our way where there were three or four roads leading in different directions, that some person who knew where all the roads led, had erected a sign-board, the arms of which pointed along

the roads and the point to which each road would lead you was plainly marked on the arms, so that even a stranger could find the right way.

We have no such sign-boards on life's highway. There are as many highways in life's journey as there are persons. The only guides we have on this journey of life, are the teachings of the Divine Father as found in the Bible and the actual experience of those who have made the journey, or part of it. Do you see that dwarfed and scraggy elm yonder by the margin of the creek? That elm has a good place to grow; the ground where it stands is a rich loam which has accumulated from falling leaves and branches in the many ages of the past. The roots reach down into the rich soil and feed upon it and are continually refreshed by the waters of the creek. There are no large trees very near it, to shade it and obstruct its growth. Still, with all these advantages, the trunk is small, not more than ten inches through, and it is not nearly as tall as some of the trees about it which are located not so favorably.

Look up the trunk twenty or thirty feet near that limb which grows out to the north-east, and you will see a hole in the body of the tree. This shows the tree is hollow, dead at the heart and unhealthy. Well, my boy, I have known that tree for twenty years. Away back when the bears, deer and wolves were plenty here, I knew that tree.

I once killed a deer near where we are seated and hung it on the branches of that tree so the wolves could not get it 'till I went home for help to carry it. Let me see, that was twenty years, yes more than twenty years ago. That tree was as large then as now. You naturally wonder at this. Listen and I will explain it. Look carefully at the top branches of the tree. See how bunchy and thick they are. The limbs look as though they had all grown together. That effect, and in fact the whole trouble with the tree, is caused by a wild grape vine. Just step 'round this way a moment; now look along up the body of the tree from the ground. Do you not see that long, smooth vine, about as big as your wrist, running up the tree? That is a wild grape vine and is as old or nearly as old as the tree. The grape vine was there when I first saw the tree only it was not so large. It has hung to the tree all these years and has grown stronger and larger all the time. It has kept the tree from growing by binding its strong tendrils about the branches, and you can see where the vine itself winds around the tree, there is a whitish mark. That is where the tough body of the grape vine has chafed and wounded the bark of the tree when the wind was strong and made the tree rock to and fro. That vine, in its effect on that tree, has been that of a great vegetable snake. It has held the tree down; it has retarded its growth; it has wounded it and made it unsightly

and the other trees about it have outgrown it, and have kept smooth, healthy and handsome.

Well, my boy, let me tell you, that vine is to that tree what sin and wrong is to a boy. If a boy does wrong, commits a sin and does not get rid of its effects, such as profanity, drinking intoxicating beverages, smoking and chewing tobacco, or untruthfulness, until he gets the habit fastened on him, then the sin or wrong will weigh and tie the boy down. It will chafe and wound him. It will make him small in mind and perhaps dwarfed in body. This will give other boys, who have no such bad habits, a chance to get the start of him in the race of life. So you will see you can learn a life lesson from the elm and the grape vine which may, and I hope will, be of use to you hereafter.

I have now finished my lesson and have a notion to tell you a hunting story, the end of which was near this spot. It will not take long, and we ought to rest a little after eating.

A long time ago, when I still lived with my father, and when I was seventeen years of age, while we were on a deer hunting trip, my father and I came near the "Turtle Ponds," to the eastward of Tamerack Swamp, about a mile from here. You will recollect that I spoke to you about these ponds one day while we were looking for the pole which we raised on the corner to put a flag on.

Well, as we came near one of these small ponds we discovered the tracks of a bear and found where he had gone down to the pond to drink. There seemed to be a sort of path where the animals went down the bank to get water, for there were other bear tracks besides those which had attracted our notice. There was no chance of getting the animal then, but my father said that if the bear trap was skillfully placed in or near that path, so the brute would not notice it, the old fellow might be caught. It was about three miles home, but the next day, with the consent of my father, and after some instructions from him, I took the old bear trap and started for the turtle ponds. This old bear trap weighed about thirty pounds and when set was an ugly customer. In order to bend the springs, so as to open the jaws and set the trap, we were obliged to use a hand-spike or long lever of wood. When the jaws were open it was as big as a ten quart pan, and when the jaws came together with nothing between them you could hear them twenty rods. There was a strong iron chain, about five feet long, securely fastened to a ring in the trap, and to the other end of the chain was a ring about two inches in diameter. This trap made a heavy load to carry, especially as I had with me a hatchet and gun.

Well, I arrived at the spot where we had seen the bear tracks, and found that the night before one or more

bears had traveled down the same road to the water. After a good deal of work, I succeeded in opening the jaws of the trap and fastening them open by the strong iron tongue prepared for that purpose. Then I cut down a water beech, which had a stem about an inch and a half in diameter, and which had long, tough limbs. This little tree was about eight feet long. For about three feet from the butt end, I clipped the ends of the limbs off so as to leave them next the body about a foot long. Then I put the butt end of the little tree through the ring on the end of the chain to the trap and bent down the stubs of limbs I had left on it, and slipped the ring by the stubs one after another until the ring was up past several and next to the limbs which I had left as they grew. There the trap was and there the "clog" was. Slowly and carefully I moved the trap and clog along towards the pond, so that I would make as little stir in the leaves as possible, and so the trap would remain set. At first I was quite troubled where to put the trap so that the wary animals would not notice it and so that they would not smell it. There was a log about ten inches through, about half way down the bank to the water that lay across the path, or partial road the animals had made, and I made up my mind that on the water side of that log was the spot to place the old trap, so I calculated about how far a bear in going down to the water would, when he

stepped over the log, step beyond the log, and after a good deal of trouble, placed the trap at that point. I put the tree to which the trap was fastened on one side of the path and carefully covered up the chain. I worked some time to leave the ground looking natural and remove my own tracks by the liberal use of leaves and branches. After I fixed it all up as well as I could, I started for home, where I arrived about dark.

After going to bed, I got to thinking about the trap and the bear, and wondering if I should be lucky enough to get him, and it was a long time before I went to sleep. Finally, I did sleep, and, before morning, I dreamed that a big bear had attempted to go down to the water, and had stepped into the trap, and the trap had fastened to one of his legs, above his big fore-foot, and the trap, bear and clog were gone. I dressed and hurried down stairs, about daylight, and told my father, who was awake, what I had dreamed, and asked to be allowed to go and see if my dream was true. He laughed, and said, "Your dream comes from excitement of your yesterday's experience, and from your continual thought about the matter. I guess you have not caught a cunning, old bear as quick as this." I urged my suit, however, and, finally, was given permission to go. I took down the rifle, that always hung ready and loaded in those days, and took the powder horn off the hook, and put the string over

my head, so the crook of the horn hung under my left arm, and called the dog. We had a big dog, whose name was "Buff," and he had helped to kill many a bear and deer. He came to me and signified not only his willingness, but his delight to go.

Away we went, in the early dawn of a November morning. The air was quite cold, but my blood was up, and I was warm enough. Across the back fields, to the eastward, I went, and struck into the woods, in the direction of "Turtle Pond," at a swinging pace. After traveling for about half the distance to my destination, I happened to think about my ammunition, and at once it occurred to me that I had not a single bullet with me, except the one in the gun. This was a discovery which made me fairly weak. I sat down on a log, and examined every pocket I had carefully. There was powder enough in the horn, patches in a little box in the stock of the gun, but not a single spare bullet. Here I was alone in the woods, half way to the trap, expecting to find a bear foot in it, and I had only one shot for the fight which was sure to come. At first I thought I would go back and get the pouch of bullets, but, after a little thought, I made up my mind to trust to the one bullet and the dog. I, however, pulled the pan back, and carefully examined the powder in that, felt of the flint, to see it was tight and the edge clean, put the old gun

on my shoulder, set my lips together, and again started for the "Turtle Pond."

In about twenty minutes, I reached the hemlock ridge that skirted the little pond where the trap was put. In another minute I was standing by the side just below which I had placed the trap. The trap was gone. The ground had been torn up, the bushes just about there broken down, and to the eastward I could see where the bear had gone dragging the trap and clog with him. The old dog whined and showed his teeth, the hair on his back raised up from his head to his tail, and he started on the plain marked trail of the bear, and I started on after the dog. In a few rods we came to an old hemlock tree top to which the trail led. I expected to find here either the bear held fast by trap and clog in the old limbs, or the trap from which the bear had loosened himself. But not so, the trail led right through a part of the top and here and there I found the hemlock limbs knocked completely off or broken and the old bear had made a road through that top where a good sized ox could go with ease. When I saw this, I knew he was a big brute and an ugly fellow, and I knew too that the old trap had got a good hold and that the tough water beech clog was standing the strain beautifully. The dog kept ahead quite away, though now and then I made him go slower so I could keep up. We could follow the trail as easy as though you had been along there and mowed a swath with a scythe.

The trail led toward this creek above here about half a mile. Soon we came to the creek and there the trail turned westward, partially back toward the hemlock swamp, which was no doubt the home of the bear. I made up my mind from what I saw, that the bear was not far off, and since he had failed to cross the creek, I knew he did not wish to cross it with the trap and clog hanging to him. I knew every bend in the creek then, as well as now. I thought I knew where he would go. I started to cut across to get ahead of him. I reached a point about eighty rods above here, near where Benson's orchard is, and I heard the dog bark and the bear growl. I had got ahead and the dog had come up with the bear and they were coming slowly towards me. Now and then I could hear the bear snarl and the dog growl and bark, and then it would be quiet again. Then the same thing would occur, each time it would be nearer to me, and they seemed to be coming right toward me. At last I heard the chain rattle about six or seven rods from me in the brush near an old fallen tree, the trunk of which ran near where I stood, and there ended at the stump. The dog again, at this point, tackled the bear, and the bear turned on him and the old chain and trap rattled at a great rate.

The old bear growled and snarled enough to make one's hair stand on end. Then the bear started along

the old tree trunk, toward the stump, but on the other side. It at once occurred to me that when the bear came in sight, near the stump, was the time for me to kill him with my one bullet.

Along the bear came. He could not travel fast, for he had to drag the trap, chain, and clog, and he had been worried by the dog, until he was tired. Every time he put down his fore paw, I could hear the trap and chain rattle. The clog would, now and then, strike a small shrub or tree, and make it sway and tremble, and I could see over the old log, just where the bear was all the time. I cocked and put the old flint rifle to my face, and aimed it about where I thought the bear would come in sight by the stump. I was as steady as a post, and never thought I had but one bullet, and was about to shoot at a beast that was king of that forest, and as angry as angry could be. I glanced along the long barrel of the rifle, and saw the front sight plainly through the back sight. I did not even breathe, and my heart seemed for a moment to have stopped beating. Just then the large nose of the bear appeared, and his great, shaggy head. Steadily I let the nose and the head appear, though it was but a flash of time, and when the ear appeared in sight, I dropped the gun muzzle so the sight covered the butt of his ear and pulled the trigger. A flash of powder in the pan, with a puff of smoke, and

the sharp, whiff-like crack of the rifle came, and I knew the bullet had started on its journey. The sound of the rifle went in and out among the great trees of the forest, till it died away in the far distance. When the smoke which the discharge had made floated away, I looked for the bear, and there he lay in a great heap, just on the spot where he was when I fired.

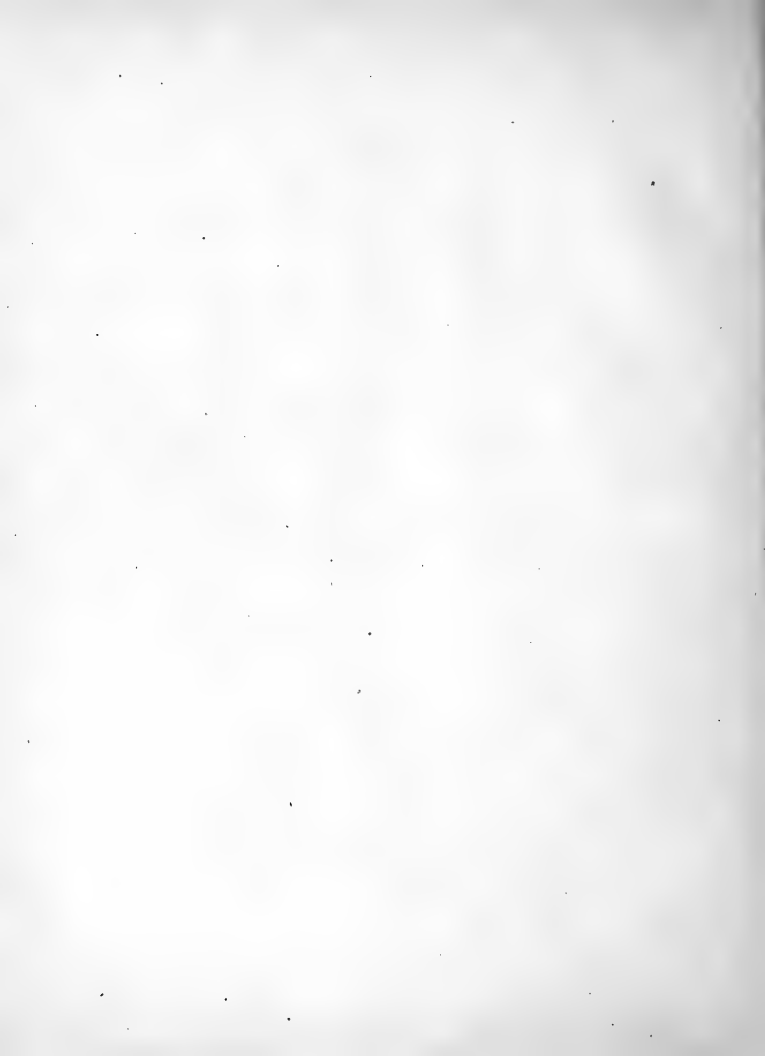
I ran up with my hatchet, to give any additional blow needed, but none was required. The old bear that used to drink at "Turtle Pond" was dead.

There the old trap was fast to his leg, just above his big foot. He was a monster, and would weigh full four hundred pounds. The one bullet, in the right place, had sent him to his long home. The old bear, in his struggles, had bent and partly broken the clog, but it still hung to the chain.

I stood my gun beside a tree, took off my coat, and, with my hunting knife, removed the skin, being careful to leave the long, sharp claws of the feet attached to it. I had some hard work to unclasp the trap from the bear's foot, but I finally accomplished it, and took the faithful old iron, and hid it carefully, covering it with a large piece of hemlock bark, to keep it dry.

I cut off fifteen or twenty pounds of the best of the meat and laid it on the inside of the skin. I then searched till I found a moose wood tree and peeled some long strips





of the bark from it, I then rolled the skin up in as small a compass as possible, with the bear meat inside, and carefully tied it with the bark.

I swung the skin over my right shoulder, took my gun in my left hand and turned my face homeward. I had three miles to go and a heavy load to carry. But I had killed a bear and was young and strong as an ox, and just as the sun sank out of sight, away off over Lake Ontario, I stepped into my father's house, hungry and tired, but I had killed a bear.

All my family, including my father, who was an old hunter, wondered and listened to my story of the capture with great interest.

Thus it was that I had followed information conveyed to me in a dream and found the information correct.

Just at this moment, my father arose and reached for his gun. I looked at him and saw him drop his head and turn his right ear toward "Old Dick's Slash." He put his left hand out toward me and I heard the sound come from his lips which always denoted silence and caution, "sh." His right hand held his gun at a point just below the muzzle and the breech rested on the ground. The old ancient trees of the original forest were all about us and waters of "South Branch" just off to our left. The autumn sun sent its beautiful light down through the trees even to his feet.

At first I did not hear a single sound, except the soft rattle of the partly dried leaves on the trees and ground which moved in the slight breeze which was stirring. Very soon, however, I heard a slow, regular sound which appeared to come from the direction we had intended to go. It at first seemed like the sound made by a fowl in the yard when he stretches his neck up and flops his wings against his body, only the sound seemed loud and regular. The first beats were slow but they grew faster and faster, until there was simply one continuous rumble, which was a little like low, distant thunder.

The noise stopped and I said, "It is going to rain, that is thunder." I saw father's handsome lips part and form into a beautiful smile and he said, "No, my boy, that noise is made by a partridge, he was drumming and you will hear him again soon." Sure enough the low, regular, curious sound commenced again. It grew louder and louder till the whole woods seemed to be filled with it, when it died away again and we could hear no sound except the wind among the leaves and the musical gurgle of the water in the creek, as it went in and out among the alders on its way towards the lake.

Father said, "That is a grand old father partridge. They do not often drum in the fall of the year, this one evidently feels proud that the summer is past and his children, the young birds, have lived and grown up and

are very likely within hearing now, looking for berries for food or playing in the sunshine and soft leaves, as they like to do. Then, too, the old fellow probably thinks he is a good drummer and he desires to make a reputation by furnishing music to all the birds hereabout. I do not know that all this is true, but probably it is. We will try and get near enough to him to see the performance and perhaps we may get the old fellow, cunning as he is. I think I know where he is and it is nearly in the direction I intended to go anyway."

So the old gourd cup was carefully hung on the branches near the spring so it would be here at some future time and for our needs. Father started on toward the point where the drumming had come from and I noticed he stepped carefully. With dead leaves and small dry brush all about I could not see how he could walk and make so little noise. He seemed to put his toes down first and glide along as quietly as a shadow almost. I followed after him as still as I could, but with all my care I made more noise than he did. We soon came to the margin of "Old Dick's Slash." Here the great tall trees ended and we stepped in among the second growth of maple, beech and birch trees. These little trees were from twenty to thirty feet tall and not very thick. The frost here had been able to reach the leaves more thoroughly and there were few leaves left except down near

the ground. Now and then there was an old tree or log lying in the way, and take it all in all it was a most beautiful cover for birds.

Just as we stepped in among this second growth, father stopped and his left hand came back toward me with the movement which meant silence. The old bird commenced again and I saw father bend a little forward, grasping his gun in his right hand. As soon as the noise of the drumming was loud, father stepped to the little hemlock. It seemed to me he made no noise at all. I followed and reached him just as the bird was winding up his concert. I got along very well except at one point I stepped on a dry twig and it made a little crackling sound. When I reached father, he was on his hands and knees right behind the little evergreen and his gun lay at his side. I lay prone beside him and to his left. When I looked for the old tree trunk on which we had supposed the partridge concerts had taken place and where we hoped to see the bird, there it was in plain sight, its whole length from root to limbs, but no bird was to be seen. I thought at first I had probably over-looked him and so I carefully searched every foot of the old tree, but there was no bird there.

Father then turned toward me and whispered very low, "The cunning fellow heard that noise you made when you stepped on that bush, but he has not flown or we should have heard him. He has just stepped off on

the other side of the log and run a little ways out in the bush and if we keep perfectly still here until he gets over his fright and suspicions, he will come back to his old place and execute another piece."

We waited five minutes nearly and all the time I could hear my heart beat and feel my shirt and jacket move by the throbs. Sure enough, we heard a little sound and looked away down toward the top of the old tree and the bird had just jumped from the ground upon the tree; the noise of his feet made what I heard. He stood there as still as a rock, facing us for as much as half a minute, and then he turned in a sort of stately way toward the old root and commenced to walk along the log; now and then he would stop and stand perfectly still and then walk on. He was the handsomest bird I ever saw. He was as proud as a peacock. There was a black ruffle of feathers about his neck and he stood up as straight and trim as could be.

The dog "Snap" was lying between father and me, and he saw the bird, but he put his nose down between his paws, and turned first to father, and then to me, as much as to say, "Give it to him." Pretty quick I saw both of the bird's wings raise from his body together. The wings were not open as fully as when flying, but only partly open. He just lifted them, and struck his own body with them. At first the movements were very slow, and then faster and faster, until the wings looked

like a fast revolving wheel. Whew! what a noise he did make though!

After the performance, the bird walked five or six feet away, and fairly strutted as he went. I saw father's right hand move toward his gun. His fingers grasped the stock and barrel of the old "smooth bore," and, in a flash, it was at his face, all cocked and ready. A second, and then a flash and roar, and lots of smoke, and I heard a fluttering, and the dog, "Snap," was gone. It was but a moment, when the dog brought, and laid down at our side, the dead body of the famous drummer of "Old Dick's Slash."

Father said, "You seem astonished at something—what is it?" I said, "I suppose the partridge hit the log with his wings when he drummed?" "Oh, no," said father, "If you will think a moment, you will see that would not do, for he would thrash his wings all to pieces in no time." After father had loaded his gun, we started in the direction of home, which was not more than a mile away. Father said, "We have had a delightful day, and have done well, too, for we now have two partridges, a wood-cock, and a black squirrel. We shall, very likely, find no more game to-night, for the sun is well down, and we must hurry home, and help do the chores. We will, like good hunters, however, walk through the woods, as far as we can, on our way home, and we may shoot a partridge or two, yet, to-night."

We soon reached the town-line road. We followed the road only a short distance, and then stepped into the first tall sugar maples, beeches and hemlocks, on the other side of the way. What grand old trees they were. There they had grown for centuries, and would grow for centuries longer, if man and his axe would let them alone.

I heard the lonesome and musical song of a bird. It appeared to be but part of a tune. It was something like this in sound: "Tee we wee, Tee we wee," and seemed to be from a single bird. I asked father what kind of a bird it was, and he said, "That is what I call a wood thrush, and he sings that lonesome song just before a rain. You may look out for rain to-morrow."

We soon passed through the sugar bush and cane and came out into a sort of half cleared strip of land, just beyond which was an old brush fence and just beyond the old brush fence were ten or twelve acres of underbrush which extended to the pasture. As we stepped up to this old brush fence the dog jumped upon it and off on the other side and screamed as he went. In a moment there was a babel of noise from the wings of three partridges as they rose from the ground where they had been rolling and playing in the dirt like hens.

The birds were astonished and so were we. One of the partridges said, "Quit, quit, quit!" and lighted on

the limb of a tree right in sight. The branch on which the bird rested bent down quite a little. I recollect seeing the bird light and set there among the leaves and then father's gun was discharged and down she came. The dog brought the partridge over the fence to father. One of the other birds flew past us into the woods and made for a clump of small hemlocks about twenty rods back on the road we had come.

Father said to me, "That bird went toward those hemlocks and this late hour of the day is favorable to her lighting in the first good hide she comes to. You go and look those hemlocks over one by one carefully and you will be very likely to find her. I will look for the other one that went off here to the right."

Then it was that I started on my first real hunt alone. I went along quickly, but carefully, towards the hemlocks. There were five of these trees in a group and from the side I was approaching the branches were so thick (and I was looking toward the dark thick woods, too,) that I could not see the parts of the trees where the bird would be likely to light. I went way round the bunch of hemlock until I could look into them from the woods side and toward the light of the west. The light was growing a little dim for the sun was sinking down close to the horizon, but my eyes were good then.

I carefully examined every branch on the tree next to

me, and then the next, and found no partridge. I began to feel the chances were slim of finding the bird as the best trees for him to light in I had already searched. But I commenced to examine the third tree. I began first to scan the lower limbs and my eyes passed along up the tree and searched each limb carefully. When my eyes had reached two-thirds to the top of the tree and about thirty feet from the ground, all at once I saw the old partridge sitting close to the body of the tree, with his breast toward me. He looked as big as a goose sure. After a second, just a second, my wits came to me and I raised the old "Pill-lock" to my face. Some how I had cocked it but I never could recollect how or when.

I looked straight at the light colored feathers of the breast and pulled the trigger. The gun made an awful noise and turned me half 'round. It gave out a long stream of fire and lots of smoke. I remember hearing the noise of the discharge as it went off down through the big maples and beeches. I never will forget that shot. It took me about a good, long second to bring myself together. I looked to the foot of the tree and there lay the bird dead as a stone. I ran where he was and picked him up.

That was one of the proudest moments I have ever known in my life. I turned my face toward the sky, and gave a halloo of joy and victory. Just then the dog

came to me in a bound—to see what all the noise was about, I suppose. I held the bird down to the spaniel, and he looked up in my face and whined, and moved his tail, as much as to say, “Well, that is good enough.”

I went along out to where father was. I had the old “Pill-lock” in one hand, still smoking, and the partridge in the other. There were logs and bushes in my road, but I say to you, here and now, that I did not remember stepping over either logs or brush.

I held up to father’s gaze the partridge, and he said, “Well, well, you have done it sure. That is a fine bird, and ‘it was a lucky venture when you went after him. You are all right now, and shall go hunting again with me.”

We passed down through the under-brush and out into the pasture by the spring, east of our house. As we came in sight of home, the sun was below the western hills, but had left a glow, which marked the spot plainly above it.

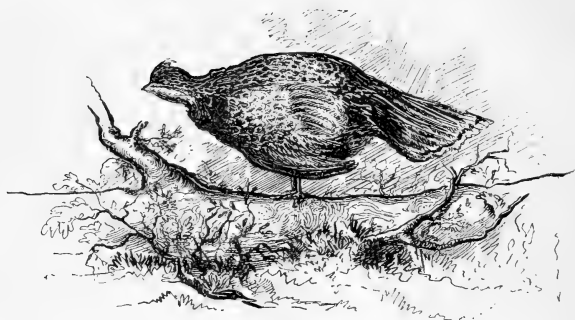
Near the house, on the platform by the well, looking toward us, stood my mother. Her right hand was shading her eyes and she appeared to be watching for us anxiously. When I came near enough to see her plainly she was smiling a happy welcome to father and me. Her dark hair was well brushed back from her face, which glowed with happiness. Her features were as calm, pure and sweet as are given to mortal to be.



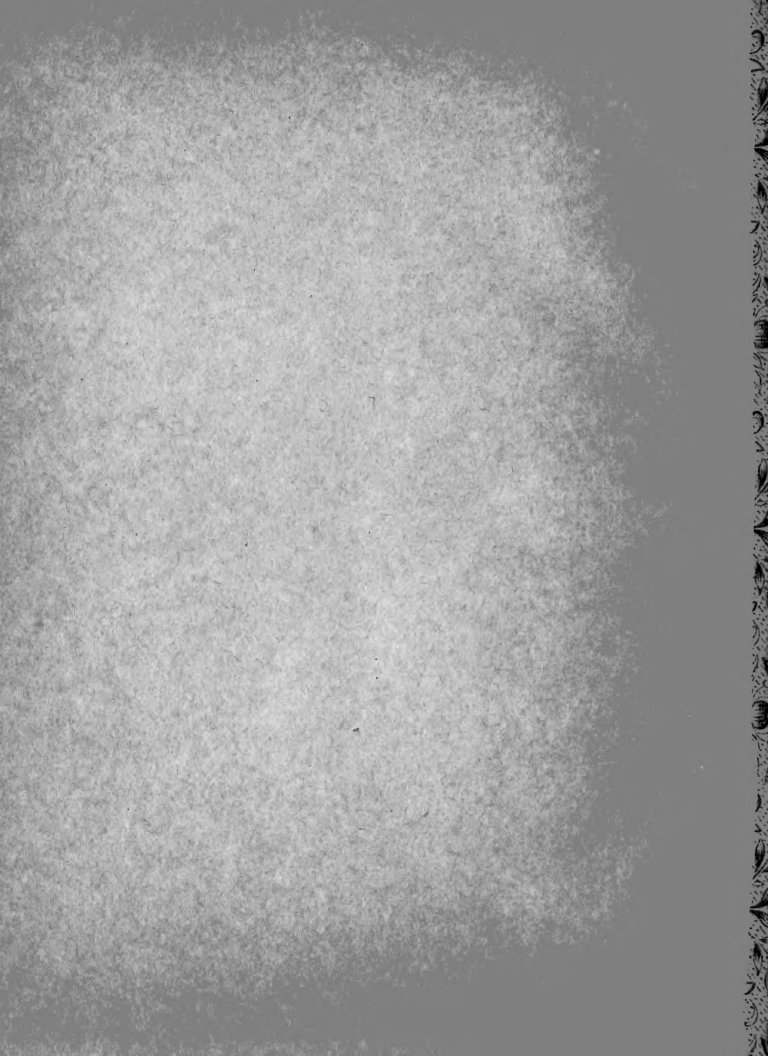
It seemed to me then, and seems to me now, that she was the grandest, sweetest and best woman in all the world.

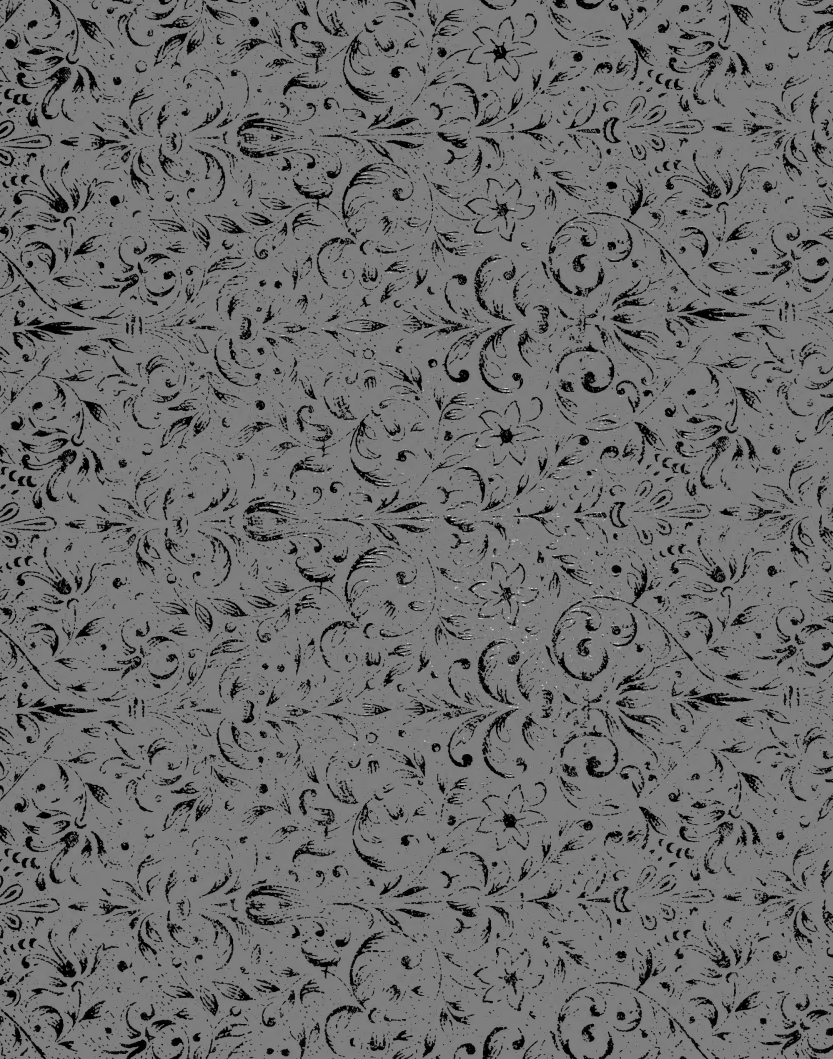
I ran ahead of father when I saw her and as I came near I held up my partridge. She reached out both her hands and I thought, as much as could be, she was going to take the bird, but she grasped me, and drew me close up to her, and kissed me again and again. For a sweet moment I forgot my hunt and my success, and the whole world, in the love of my mother.

I have told you the history of one day out of seventeen thousand, and, if you are pleased with it, I will tell you about a trout-fishing trip I had the next spring, with my father, along the waters of the "South Branch of the Little Salmon."

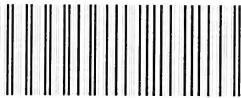








LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 002 894 616 8