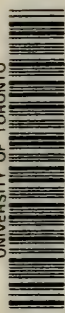


MORE ABOUT THE SQUIRRELS

ELEANOR TYRRELL

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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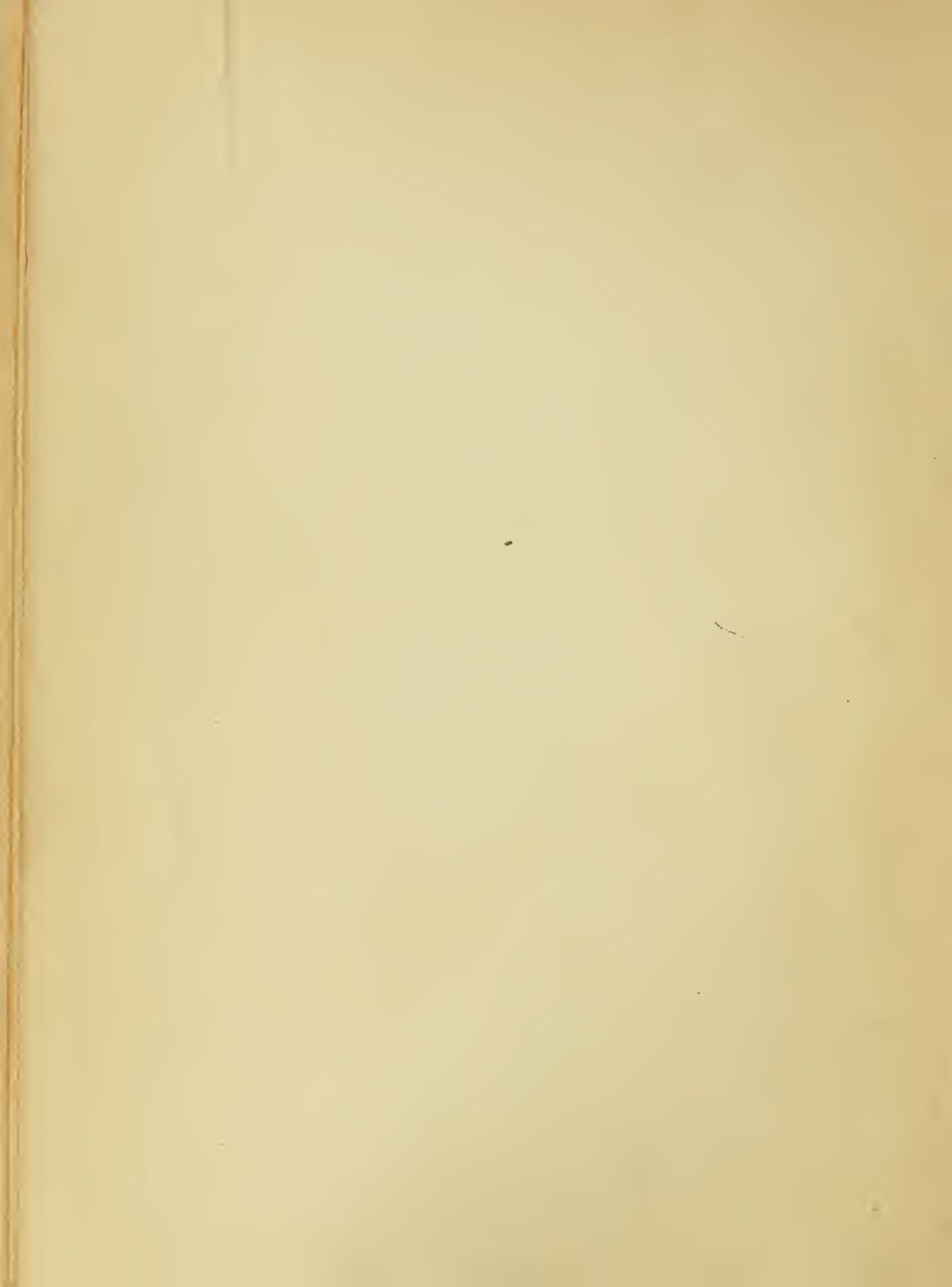
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B.A., F.R.D., F.R.S.C.,
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Graduate of the University of Toronto,
and eminent Canadian geologist,
explorer, and scholar





Edith Lyrell

with love from the writer.

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MORE ABOUT THE SQUIRRELS.



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The squirrel sprang here, there, and everywhere.

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MORE ABOUT THE SQUIRRELS

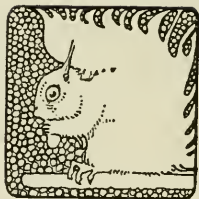
BY

ELEANOR TYRRELL

AUTHOR OF

"HOW I TAMED THE WILD SQUIRRELS," ETC.

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS, LTD.
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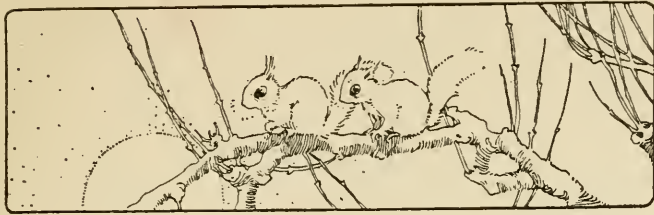
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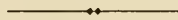
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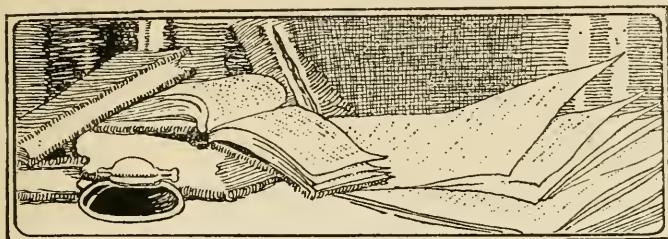
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FOREWORD.

AMONGST the many satisfactions of writing is that of receiving letters of appreciation from unknown friends. From all parts of the United Kingdom, from Canada and from South Africa, animal lovers have written to me expressing their pleasure in reading "How I Tamed the Wild Squirrels," published in the autumn of 1914 by Messrs. Nelson and Sons, Ltd. The note most frequently struck is that of gratitude for something to think about that had lessened for a while the sadness and depression caused by this terrible war.

That many of these correspondents have asked for more tidings of Fritz and his companions, must be my excuse for putting forth another book about them—again illustrated

by Miss Appleton's clever and delicate pen and brush.

Fritz has now enjoyed the liberty of the garden for four years. His first wife deserted him after the advent—from the country of the Huns—of a fierce little red compatriot, who would brook no rival. She and he have since produced a most charming orange and gray son, who happily shows all his father's sweet confidence and none of his mother's truculence.

Young Fritz is now a daily visitor to my bedroom, and, to the joy of our young people, sometimes finds his way to other parts of the house.

Mr. and Mrs. Laurence Housman are rarely seen. Fritz, as the first-comer, has stood his ground and chased them far. Occasionally in bitter weather, or in early spring (when food is most scarce), they will furtively creep back to the old squirrel-house—the door of which is always open—to steal the secreted nuts of

the Fritz family. And, as proof of their domestic felicity, comes sometimes a mysterious and beautiful young black-tailed squirrel—a tail orange-tipped, with delicate markings of gray.

Is it possible that these two fiery-red beings have produced a creature so unlike themselves? I think it is. Red-haired human parents sometimes have black-haired children, so why should not squirrels?

In Nature study one is always learning, refuting former deductions and coming to conclusions which, after more patient observation, prove themselves false. Thus I recollect be-moaning my little Fritz's miserable and mangy appearance in the month of July, after six months of liberty. And I said in "How I Tamed the Wild Squirrels" that I thought these little animals, given proper food and space for exercise, are happier and better off in captivity than when running wild. I have since learned that all male adult squirrels look

miserable and mangy in July, because they are then "changing their tails."

One hears people exclaim: "I have just seen a dear little squirrel. It must be quite a baby, for it had no hair on its tail." Young squirrels in July, and long before, are very fully furred, and have delightful tails. It is their fathers who are going about thus dilapidated. The mothers change a little later in the year.

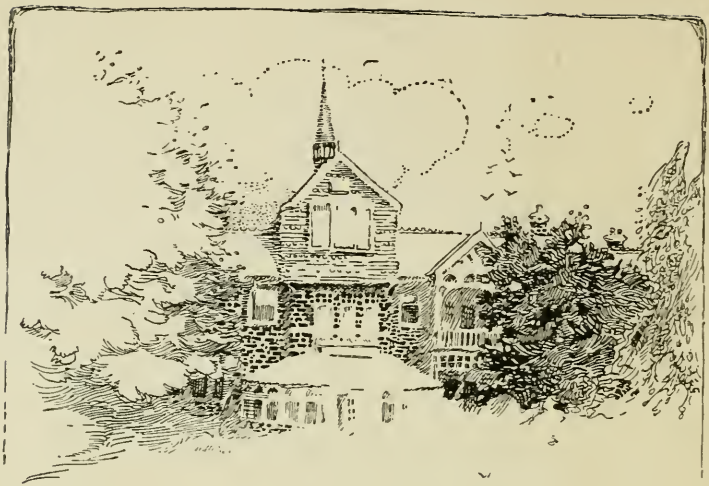
But space forbids more on this fascinating subject. My thanks are due to Messrs. Nelson for turning out both books so attractively, and at a price so moderate. And especially are they due to Miss Appleton for her careful and charming illustrations.

Go forth then, little book, with my love to all squirrel lovers young and old.

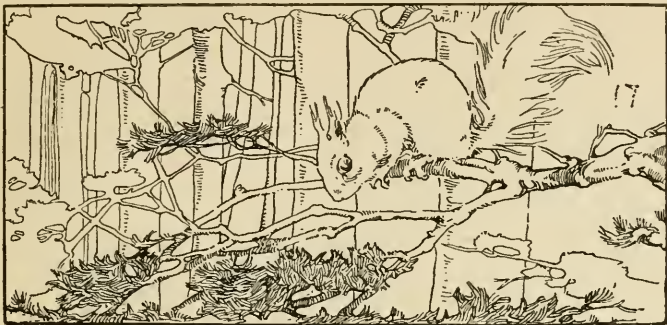
ELEANOR TYRRELL.

ST. KATHERINE'S, HOOK HEATH,
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PART I.
MORE ABOUT THE SQUIRRELS.



St Katherine's.
Hook Heath.



MORE ABOUT THE SQUIRRELS.

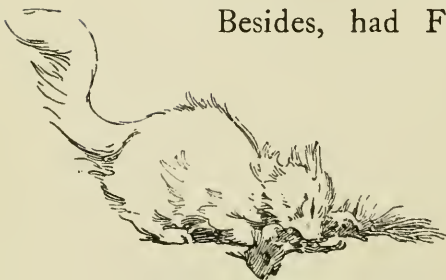
AS I am often asked about the little beasts whose adventures were set forth in "How I Tamed the Wild Squirrels," perhaps a further account of my furry friends will not come amiss.

I no longer keep any of them confined. After the death of three in the winter of 1914, I resolved that, dear and fascinating as they were as little companions in my room, I would never have them caged and in artificial conditions again.

There are two pairs of Germans loose in our little wood—Mr. and Mrs. Fritz and Mr. and Mrs. Laurence ; while the wild Surrey ones, the little natives, come to the garden from the firs on the railway cutting.

There is no doubt that Fritz, the German, with his superior strength and masterfulness, drove away that first little colony which I had tamed so wonderfully. Toto had met a tragic death, killed by a marauding cat. Tito and Tara and the dainty little thing I used to call Miss Fritz after a time took up their quarters elsewhere. I have since come to the conclusion that Miss Fritz was not Miss Fritz—more probably Miss Tito. As she grew to maturity she proved herself entirely a Surrey squirrel. There was no tint of orange or gray about her, and she remained when full-grown as small and dainty as the rest, showing not a sign of the German larger, coarser breed.

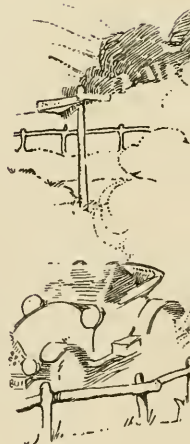
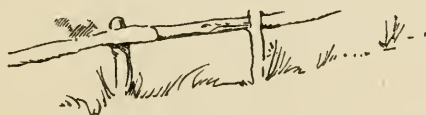
Besides, had Fritz been her father, she



would not have disappeared from the wood. Young squirrels remain with their parents, I am told, for a year. Fritz had been assiduous in his attentions to a very charming squirrel with a lovely tail, whom for some time I had called Mrs. Fritz, but she too vanished in September 1913 and left him master of the wood.

He became very lonely. It was poor fun to be cock of the walk when there was none to dispute his sway. Consequently, during the autumn, he took to visiting Wych Hill, Hurstgate, and Allen House, where the owners, also admirers of squirrels, were in the habit of hanging out cocoanuts and other dainties to attract them.

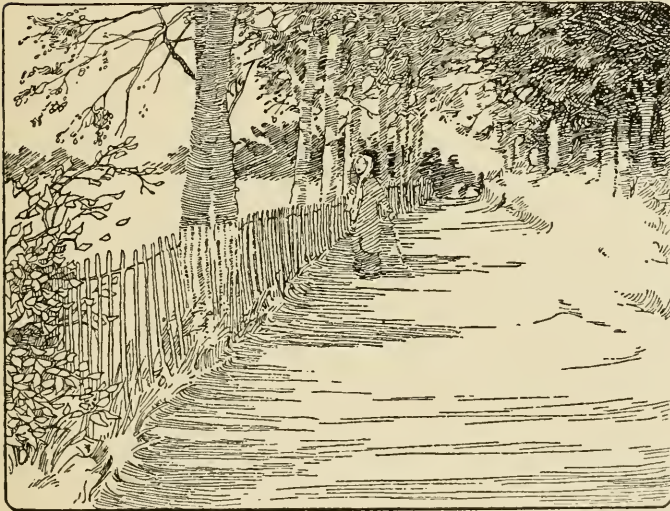
It has always been a mystery to me how he contrived to get to these plantations across the heath without being seen. To reach them he had to cross two wide public roads bristling with motor cars, bicycles, errand boys, and dogs. Besides crossing these dangerous zones,



he must (unless he went a circuitous route by fir trees, quite a mile round) have traversed an open gorsy heath. Had he his little runs, I wondered, as rabbits have? And how dangerous, with watchful cats and lynx-eyed terriers about! As long as he could keep to the trees he was safe from the latter, but there was no consecutive belt of trees from our place to those I have mentioned. That he arrived there, there was no doubt, for I sometimes found him there myself, and he would come running down the pine trees at my call. Neighbours told me of his fugitive appearances in their gardens: "A large, red squirrel, very strong and active."

Occasionally he stayed away from us altogether for a week or ten days. Sometimes the food which was placed for him would not be touched, at others it disappeared at midday, showing that he had slept away and come over for it somewhere between eleven

and twelve o'clock. When a longer time than usual elapsed without a trace of him in wood or garden, I was perfectly miserable, thinking that the dear, bright-eyed, clever little thing had at last fallen a victim to boys or dogs.



And then the joy of his reappearance at my window, as intimate and cocky as ever !

I remember one morning in particular, a soft, sunny, spring-like day in winter, I came into my room to find him, after an absence of

more than a fortnight, very hungry and very pleased with himself. He cocked his tail on one side with a rakish air, and pranced over the carpet and up the curtains, in the way he used to do when courting Bunty a year ago, and showed, with all his little squirrel nature, his affection and pleasure at our meeting again. I stuffed him with every dainty I had till he could eat no more, and insisted on hiding the rest in the ivy on the wall, where, as I knew, mice would steal it when night came.



Meantime Peter and Rufina lived in the big cage on the wall outside my other window.

They never became friends. As I have said in my former book, by the time the latter had been a fortnight in the cage she was completely mistress of the situation. She appropriated Peter's sleeping-box, she stole all his best nuts, and should he dare to approach

her while she was eating, she routed him fiercely. He was thankful when the short winter day was over, and he could sneak behind the curtains in my room and snuggle into his blue serge sleeping-bag, remaining there till next morning.

I must explain that Peter was a little English squirrel, whom I had reared from babyhood. He was now about nine months old. Rufina was a lady, German, bought from Devon and Co. at Bethnal Green. At this time I had had her barely three months.

Squirrels hate a high wind. The noise in the trees makes it difficult, I suppose, to hear enemies about. Also perhaps they fear to lose their hold of the tossing branches. Be it as it may, I was always certain that in a gale not a glimpse of a squirrel would be obtained all day. Torrents of rain, too, will deter them from scampering about; their tails get be-draggled and heavy and upset their balance.

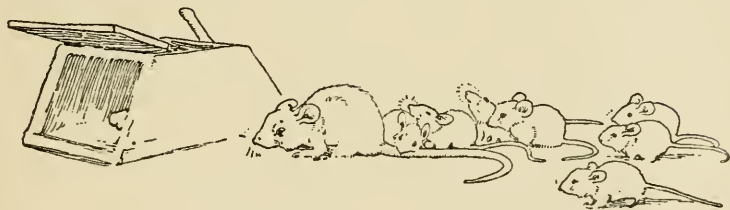


I have known Fritz come in the rain, but it generally meant that the weather was going to clear. I have seen him out in a wild snow squall. He spent a quarter of an hour once on the roof of the garden squirrel-house trying to scratch his way in through the heather thatch where a rival lived, while the snow was falling so thickly I could scarcely see him.

Young squirrels are very playful, and I think they amuse themselves with toys.

I shall never forget my astonishment at one of Rufina's achievements. There had been an empty mouse-trap in my room for some weeks. It was five or six inches long and two or three inches deep, made of wood, with a wire top. It was not baited, and I had carefully unset it in case Peter or Rufina playing about the room should put their noses inside and get nipped by the spring. The father of a mouse family had once been caught in it, and I had had some very miserable moments; but that is another

story. Ever since that tragic night his widow and children had carefully avoided it. Still, it lay under a cupboard, forgotten. One day I was surprised to see it on the floor of the squirrel-house. I wondered if the housemaid had thrown it out, meaning to take it away, and had forgotten it. The evening, however, was closing in, and I left it alone, intending to



remove it next day. Early the following morning I was awakened by extraordinary sounds in the cage, a bumping and a scrabbling quite unaccountable, punctuated every now and then by the fall of something on the floor. When I got up to look, I saw Rufina in the act of climbing up the wire netting *with the trap in her mouth.*

I watched her. She gave me a backward glance, as much as to say, "Don't *you* interfere," and recommenced her haulings and tuggings. She dragged the thing some four feet up, and then along a wooden bar till she got below the little platform outside the sleeping-box. Then she made a spring, but lost her hold of the trap, and down it came clattering to the floor. What could she want it for? It was no good as a receptacle for storing nuts, as the spring door was closed, and the wires were too closely set for it to be possible to push anything through them. I came to the conclusion that she meant to place it somewhere as a barrier to circumvent Peter.

The whole of the morning was occupied by the persistent little creature in efforts to get her plaything up to where she wanted it. It fell to the floor quite a dozen times, but she tackled it again, every time with unabated energy. I questioned the housemaid as to



why she had thrown it into the cage, and found that she had never touched it. Rufina must therefore have dragged it from under the cupboard, across the room, and by a great effort jumped with it in her mouth to the level of the window-sill, about two and a half feet from the floor.

By the evening, however, it had disappeared, and I descried it at last in the very topmost corner of her home. It was above the sleeping-box, wedged into an old bicycle basket, which was nailed under the eaves. This had some hay in it, and was used for hiding nuts. Did Rufina place it there as a shield against Peter's thefts?

After a day or two the trap fell down again, and I took it away, afraid lest a little paw might be caught and wedged between the wires.

When Miss Appleton kindly undertook to

illustrate my first book about the squirrels, though she stayed with us several times in order to sketch Fritz and Bunty from life, it was found necessary for her to have a squirrel model in her friends' studio in London, where she was working at the time. A wire-netting place was therefore improvised on the roof, outside the high studio window in Kensington, and in due time came a package from Devon and Co. labelled "LIVE SQUIRREL."



The lady artists who owned the studio were delighted at the idea of having this little pet, and, in Miss Appleton's absence, proceeded at once most incautiously to open the box. They prised one end open, and were going to bring it to the door of the cage they had prepared, when hey! presto! there was a flash, a scurry of fur upon hands and arms, and away went the squirrel helter-skelter over pictures, statuary, easels, chairs, and shelves. Crash! crash! bang went glass, smashing to

atoms, down fell pictures, over went models, and a wild and exciting uproar followed. The artists shrieked, the squirrel sprang here, there, and everywhere in a fifty by seventy feet room crammed indiscriminately with painters' and sculptors' paraphernalia.

Inarticulate with laughter, the ladies sprang after it. Faster and faster it flew, taking wild leaps from the top of one easel to another; pattering swiftly over angels' wings and Mercury's helmet, over Clytie's bust and the horns of Mephistopheles; diving down to the floor, scrambling up the walls, till dismay arose as the bewildered creature jumped upon the stove and ran along the hot-water pipes.

More than an hour was spent in this breathless chase, till some one bethought her of a tiny room across the vestibule. Setting the door open, the frightened little beast was at length chased into this, and the door shut. A model's cloak was flung over the runaway



and twisted round the struggling bundle, which was transferred to its future home.

The ladies of the studio were great admirers of Mr. Laurence Housman, so the new arrival was named after him by common consent.

Laurence spent the following four and a half months (from the beginning of November till the middle of March) in a cage about three feet by two, which was fastened against a chimney-pot on the roof.

I have often wondered what his nights were like, with London cats all round.

He was furnished with a sleeping-box, with a hinged lid. I once saw him asleep, as my friend opened the top. Anything neater and warmer could not well be imagined. Wood-wool was tightly wedged round the inside of the box first, then came a thick layer of cotton-wool, all of which he had arranged himself. In the middle, a curled red centre, lay the squirrel fast asleep, his face completely hidden.

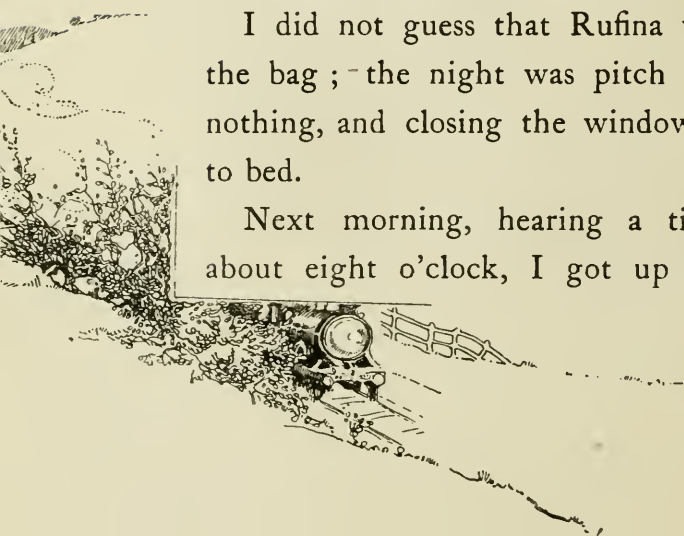
The box lid fitted tightly down over this compact mass, and the two little holes at either end, through which he crept in and out, were so small, I wondered how he could get any air at all.

When I went away for the Christmas week of 1913, I could not leave Peter and Rufina the run of my bedroom. The house being shut up and empty, with no one to see after them, they would have made hay of all my possessions. So I hung the sleeping-bag on a nail on the wall inside the cage, and shut and bolted the window, giving Smithers, the gardener, instructions to feed them and replenish the water-jar from outside; this he was accustomed to do by means of a ladder. He told me that Rufina sometimes jumped out of the bag when he put his hand in to scatter nuts; so poor Peter must have been forced to give up even this pet hiding-place.

When I returned from Devonshire on 1st January, both squirrels were invisible. As the weather was bitterly cold, I was a little anxious when night came on lest their jar of water should be frozen; so I opened the window, and, finding a solid block of ice, I took the vessel in and replenished it. I mention this, as I fancy my action was the cause of the tragedy which followed. The casement opened backwards upon the inner wall of the cage, against which, upon a nail, hung the blue cloth bag I have spoken of. The casement would just touch this bag and shake it, though it was protected a little by a branch of the shrub which grew up through the cage.

I did not guess that Rufina was asleep in the bag; - the night was pitch dark. I saw nothing, and closing the window again, went to bed.

Next morning, hearing a tiny pattering about eight o'clock, I got up to peep and





(1,892)

The snow was falling so thickly I could scarcely see him.

See page 24.

see my little pets. What was my astonishment and distress to see Rufina's little form dangling, stiff and cold, from the platform against the sleeping-box. Above, there glared down upon me the horror-struck face of Peter, with eyes starting out of his head, and ears frantically bristling. Only for a second, for, catching sight of me, he bolted precipitately. I opened the window, jumped on the sill, and stretching up as far as I could, felt Rufina's little body. It was quite stiff and quite cold. Her head was caught and jammed between the platform and the sleeping-box; there was the space of a couple of inches or so between the two. It seemed an inexplicable thing that a squirrel should get its head into an interstice from which it could not withdraw it, or that, having got its whole head in, it should not have been able to draw its shoulders after it.

I think and hope that in her struggles she

may have broken her neck at once ; she had no purchase below with which to help herself. The accident could never have happened in the daylight. I was convinced, upon reflection, that my opening the casement overnight had startled her into jumping out of the serge bag, and that she had blindly made for the hole in the sleeping-box some three feet above. She must have missed the perch from which she always scrambled upon the platform, and from thence to the nest.

This nesting-box and platform had been in the same relative positions for a year and a half. No other squirrel had jammed its head in between them ; nor would Rufina have made the mistake had she not been in the dark, and blind and stupid with sleep.

These conclusions came to me afterwards. For the moment I extricated the little body with difficulty from the death-trap, and tried for nearly an hour to bring back life. So amazed

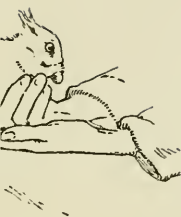
and puzzled was I at first that I could not believe she had hanged herself. I thought she was merely frozen ; for it had been a bitterly cold night, with ice everywhere. I brought her to my fire, and strove by moving her little arms backwards and forwards to bring breath back into the lungs. I chafed her tiny close-shut claws ; I held her by the fire, and rubbed her beautiful little body. She was in such perfect condition, and so exquisitely clean and sweet !

When all hope was abandoned, I laid her gently on the floor of the cage to see what Peter would do, and whether he would show any sign of grief. At sight of me at the window he fled, wildly jibbering, stamping his feet, and screaming. Here was fresh lead on my heart. It was bad enough to lose Rufina, but that Peter should look upon me as her murderer was the sharpest cut of all !

He was angry and horror-struck, but by



no means grief-stricken, however, for a few minutes later I heard him cracking nuts, busy over his breakfast.

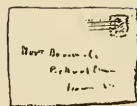


To most of us when a tragedy like this happens, the feeling is "to have no more pets." But Rufina had never been what Bunty was. She had never sat on my hand, or played with me, or come at my call, or nipped my fingers to make me quicker. She had not won her way into my heart as that first little Surrey squirrel had done. She had, it is true, just begun to come into my room and eat fearlessly, and I had had great hopes of winning her confidence as spring came on. But this hope was now shattered.

It was dismal to have nothing to play with. Peter continued so angry that he would not let me see him. Moreover, my plan of a mate of his own nationality for Fritz was frustrated. I had resolved to let Rufina loose with him in the wood when March arrived,

and here was the blunt and miserable end to all my hopes of little ones.


A week or so afterwards, therefore, found me inquiring of Messrs. Devon and Co. if haply they could find me another German female squirrel, warranted young and healthy.



In a few days Ruby arrived. We had missed meeting her at the station, and the little package came by the midday delivery van.

I expected Peter to be much annoyed by the advent of this new trespasser in his domain. He had never for two minutes been on friendly terms with Rufina. In fact, to judge from squirrel signs and tokens, he hated her; but the same day that Ruby arrived, we found the two amicably cracking nuts together.

The newcomer was very red, as Rufina had been when she first came in October. I was a little surprised at this, for it was now winter—January 1914—and Rufina's coat had long



since taken on a lovely pearly gray which, with the undergrowth of red and an autumn tail, gave her quite a distinguished air.

Ruby was a dear little kittenish creature, very fond of play. She was dreadfully afraid of me at first, and much too suspicious to venture inside my room. The sight of me at the window sent her flying into the safe shelter of the sleeping-box, and once there she would, like all the others of her sex, swear at Peter, and dig her little claws into his nose if he tried to get in too. After a week or so, however, he was allowed to get in at the back entrance, and though there were always some expostulations, he was not turned out.

She would come into the room when I was not there, and eat her fill of nuts on the inverted lid of the clothes-basket. The weather was quite mild just then, and she seemed to like her quarters better than any of the former new arrivals had done.




She had a dear little face, a lovely red coat, and a beautiful plummy tail. She kept herself exquisitely clean, and spent a good deal of time




over her toilet. Naturally, it being the depth of winter, she spent a great many hours asleep.

It is evident that caged squirrels sleep a great deal more, especially in winter, than when they are at large in the woods. Fritz



was constantly to be seen, at least twice a day for a couple of hours at a time, bounding about the trees. And I used to notice the wild ones, the year before, very active even in the snow. A biting east wind would keep them snug in their nests, or a cold pitiless rain continuing all day. Otherwise they were nearly as active in winter as in summer, with this great difference, that whereas in summer 4 a.m. would find them at my window, their morning toilet finished and their appetites keen, in winter they did not appear at all till between eight and nine o'clock, and by 3 p.m. they had curled themselves up for the night. In the summer, I have heard them cracking nuts at 8 p.m. I think they all sleep from about 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., winter or summer.



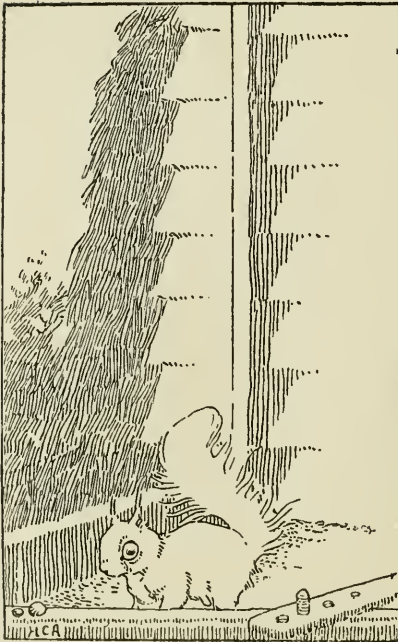
I often came upon Fritz having forty winks, on a comfortable branch sheltered from the wind, in the daytime. Squirrels' claws are so strong and flexible, and cling so firmly,

that there is no danger of their falling from any perch, awake or asleep.

It was very interesting and amusing to watch Ruby as she became more and more used to seeing me about. I would open the casement into the squirrel cage, and go back to bed and watch. This cage was built on to the wall outside my window ; it was five or six feet high, and about three feet broad, with a good wooden floor, and what made it delightfully home-like for squirrels was that an evergreen shrub grew inside against the wall right up to the eaves. Ruby would clamber down the central pole, which, with perches nailed upon it, made a capital substitute for a tree trunk, and would come peeping round the casement, to look for nuts which would be on a chair, or on the tall clothes-basket near by. Her little pointed ears, with their pretty tufts, would be sharply cocked, her whiskers quivering nervously, and her tail



erect but turned back at the tip in the form of a query. Then as I made no sign of movement she would gain confidence, and venture farther in. When she got a nut and sat up to eat it, breaking the shell so cleverly in two halves, and keeping one half in her paws as a little cup, while nibbling it her ears would come close together, and her tail would curl comfortably right over her dainty little head. She was a charming picture as she sat up, show-



ing her snow-white waistcoat, holding her food between her wee thumbs, her little jaws going like lightning, her brilliant eyes keeping a sharp lookout towards my part of the room—ready to vanish in a second should I dare to move.

And then would come another nervous and anxious little face ; this was Peter, hoping that there would be something left for him. But Ruby would scold and grumble ; and he, silently withdrawing, would wait till her ladyship had finished.



PART II.
THE TRAGEDY.





THE TRAGEDY.

WE had a very cold snap the last fortnight in January. Morning after morning the water, and also the milk, in the squirrel-house were frozen into solid blocks of ice. I did not worry. I thought squirrels were such hardy little animals. The year before, Bunty and Fritz had lived happily

through the same conditions, and been healthy and well all the time. I did not take into account that both these squirrels, being so tame and confiding, were never afraid to come inside the room, and often spent the coldest nights sleeping together in the serge bag hanging behind the curtains. This must have kept them very warm all night. Peter and Ruby were, on the contrary, so wild and timid that nothing would induce them to remain long in my room.

Little Peter, it is true, did often slip into the serge bag in the daytime; but the maid, drawing the curtains at night, annoyed and startled him, and he generally bolted for the cage.

I consoled myself with the thought that he and Ruby would keep quite warm cuddled up together in the sleeping-box. And besides, was not Fritz exceedingly well and lively all the time out of doors?





(1,842)

I saw them huddled together on the floor of the cage.

See page 54.

Poor little things ! I don't think they did sleep together. The box was partitioned inside, and I think each kept entirely to its own compartment ; and Peter, being the male, would come off worst as to nesting material.

I noticed that he was not well on the 25th January. The entry in my diary is : " Peter looks miserable, eats scarcely anything, and sleeps twenty-three hours and three-quarters out of the twenty-four."



If then I had only known ! If I had kept him inside my room, furnished the serge bag with heaps of cotton wool, and never let him spend the night in the outside cage, I should in all probability have saved his little life.

It never entered my head at this time that he had got a chill. I thought he was "out of sorts" with the approach of spring. I remembered that Bunty had seemed seedy early in February the year before, and that

with complete change of diet she had quickly recovered. I remembered that I had given her meal-worms, which she ate greedily from my hand.

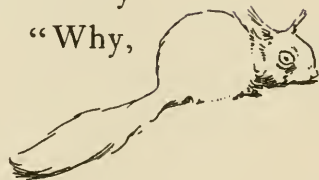
“Finger-sauce” always tempted her, whereas my poor, wild little Peter would never come near me. He would feed while I was in the room, but if I stirred so much as a hand would be off as fast as he could go. This was most disheartening after nine months’ captivity, and after having reared him from babyhood. There was something inherently untamable in him, and though I longed inexpressibly to mother and warm and coax him, I was powerless to make him better. His weakness increased, he became cruelly emaciated, and I was compelled to watch day by day the advance of a mortal illness.

He would never eat from my hand, and though I put meal-worms into his food dish, he would not touch them. Sunflower seeds

at this time were almost the only things he would eat, and but few of them. I was afraid that an exclusive diet of them was bad for his liver, and therefore gave them but sparingly. Poor little fellow! had I only known it, they were the best food for him, being most nutritious.

His fur was staring, and he never seemed to have strength enough to clean himself. All his little lickings and bitings and scratchings ceased. As the days passed he became more and more feeble. I only saw him for five or ten minutes in the twenty-four hours. He became painfully thin; his lustrous eyes were dim and apparently sunk in their sockets, instead of bulging out as all squirrels' eyes do.

What vexed me was my powerlessness, and his pitiful shrinking from me. When I tried to coax him with endearing words, and food in my hand, he would feebly scramble away from me and cease eating altogether. "Why,



oh, why !” I asked myself bitterly, “did I ever have squirrels in confinement ?”

Fritz was perfectly well and strong out in the open, bounding about from tree to tree, and voraciously hungry whenever he visited the stump or the nut traps.

Still I never guessed that Peter was suffering from a chill. “Squirrels,” I read in a natural history book—no natural history books tell one much about them—“squirrels invariably die of one thing, and that is inflammation of the lungs ; and nothing can cure them—they die in a very few days.”

It did not seem to me possible that Peter had inflammation of the lungs. There was no cough, no running at the nose—just emaciation and feebleness and loss of appetite. I gave him milk with sugar in it every day. He took a few tiny laps of it, and I thought it must be nourishing and helpful. I learnt afterwards that milk was one of the worst

things to give. The books said that squirrels died of lung trouble "in a very few days." Peter was ill more than four weeks. Soon he became too feeble to crack his nuts, so I cracked them for him; and he would eat perhaps one and a half during the five or ten minutes he was out of the sleeping-box in the mornings.

It was melancholy to see the effort it was to the poor little creature to climb back to his nest. He had to wait for breath and for strength four or five times before he finally disappeared.

By the 14th February Ruby, who had hitherto kept well and sprightly, though she also slept twenty-three hours and a half out of the twenty-four—unlike Fritz, who was to be seen several times a day in the coldest weather—Ruby, to my great grief, began to exhibit the same signs of illness as poor little Peter had shown. Her coat became rough and staring,





her eyes sunken and dull, and her appetite nil. She grew as emaciated as he, and as painfully feeble. Morning after morning it was more and more difficult to her to clamber down from her sleeping-box, and worse to clamber up again. She, too, lost strength even to crack her nuts. In vain I bought grapes and every dainty I could think of.

It was too pitiful to see them. Squirrels, as a rule, will rarely or never eat together—as one springs up another springs down. If these two happened to be feeding at the same hour, it was always in different parts of the cage or of my room. There seems a sort of etiquette about this, and it is never transgressed. But the day before my little squirrels died, I saw them both huddled together on the floor of the cage. Peter's little fore paw was over Ruby's neck, and their piteous helplessness and feebleness were very touching.

It may be asked, why did I not take them

into the warmth of my room when I first noticed something amiss? But I was afraid of adding to their distress—I was so firmly convinced that animals prefer to be let alone when they are out of sorts, and that nature cures in her own way with plenty of sleep. The nesting-box was six or seven feet from the floor of the cage and difficult to get at, through perches and the branches of the shrub that grew up inside against the wall. I ought to have unhooked the box and brought the squirrels inside altogether long ago, when day after day there was a black frost and a bitter biting north-east wind.

I believe now, looking back, that if I had done this I should not have lost them; but they were so nervous and shy, I was afraid of worrying and distressing them by changing their quarters.

Unfortunately, the wall of my pets' cage faced north. The winter sunshine used to

shine for an hour or so a day upon the top of the climbing pole, and in health this sunny perch used to be a favourite place with them. But when they were ill they never attempted to climb as high. Having quenched their thirst, and nibbled an atom of food, they struggled painfully to regain their box, and hid away for the rest of the day.

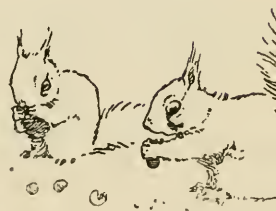
I felt it cruel to disturb them—"Sick animals curl themselves up and sleep alone in the dark," thought I, "and they will be best left unmolested." Besides, as I have said before, Bunty and Fritz had lived all through last winter in the same place, and I did not imagine that it could be the cold that was killing these two, more especially as the cold snap was all over—February came in mildly. Fritz used to come bouncing in to pay me a visit in the highest health and spirits, and in the garden squirrel-house was there not the future Mrs. Fritz extremely lively? They



had managed to keep themselves well in spite of black frosts and biting winds.

Anything more different than a sick squirrel from a healthy one cannot be conceived. The eyes, instead of protruding like carriage lamps, become flattened and then sunk in, giving the impression of blindness. The whole expression of the face becomes altered from mischievous sprightliness, an intense vivacity, to a miserable, dumb suffering. The tail is never curled over the back, but hangs down dejectedly; the ears are far apart; and the movements, instead of being electric springs and jerks, are mere crawlings, and are evidently made with great difficulty, exhausting the poor little creature very much.

I have watched Ruby, consumed with thirst, peer over from the edge of her box, and let herself go with a feeble bundling sort of slither down the pole always used for ascents and descents. She would leap feebly, with pauses

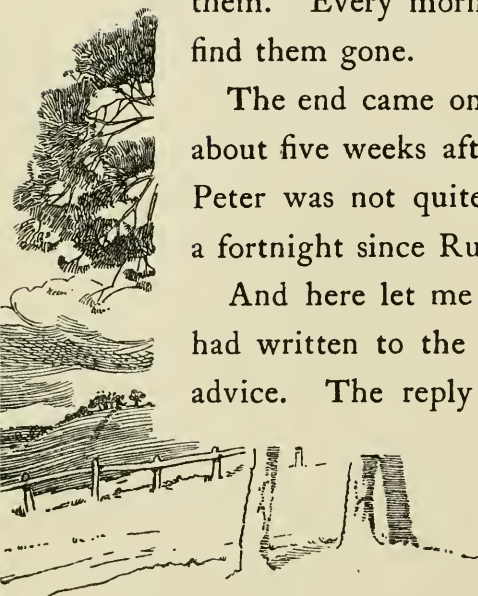


for breath between; and then, to watch her climb up again used to break my heart. It was only too evident that she found it a most exhausting performance. She would cling weakly, and wait for breath and strength to crawl up a few steps; then wait again, and finally hoist herself the few inches on to her box with panting effort.

To see animals suffer like this, and to be powerless to help, throws a black cloud over life for the time being. I longed for my pets to die, and wondered if I could chloroform them. Every morning on waking I hoped to find them gone.

The end came on the last day of February, about five weeks after I had first noticed that Peter was not quite himself, and a little over a fortnight since Ruby had begun to droop.

And here let me say, in parenthesis, that I had written to the authorities at the Zoo for advice. The reply I received was kind and



courteous; but said that probably my pets were suffering from consumption, and that nothing could be done. Perhaps I might try a little Benger's food. Now with all due deference to the larger experience and knowledge of the Zoological Society, if I had known how important it is to keep little mammals warm enough in their sleeping quarters in cold weather, and if I had taken mine in at the very first signs of illness and kept them in a warm place like the conservatory, I cannot help thinking that I should have saved them.



I think it is commonly supposed that nothing can be done for sick squirrels because the first incipient signs of illness are *not noticed and dealt with in time.*

On the morning of the day they died neither of them came out of the sleeping-box at all. So after a while, with a good deal of difficulty, I unhooked the box from the wall, and brought it inside. When I opened

the lid and looked in, each little animal was crouching in its separate compartment hiding its little face in the darkest corner.

Ruby was too far gone to resist when I picked her up and slipped her inside a warm flannel cosy, with a hot water-bag under it.

When I turned my attention to Peter, he suddenly leapt out and flew round the room in an agony of terror. He scrambled somehow up the *portière* over the door, where he used to go to hide long ago in his babyhood, and then fell with a scream. He would not let me pick him up, but pantingly struggled out of my reach. After a time the poor little thing somehow found his way to the old serge bag behind the curtain.

I tried to feed Ruby with warm sweetened milk, but scarcely a drop went down. Her little body was just skin and bone. She feebly snuggled away into the farthest corner of the cosy.



And so the miserable day dragged on. Towards evening I thought I must try to get some food down Peter's throat, for his strength in scrambling round the room had amazed me, and I did not despair of somehow pulling him round yet. He seemed sound asleep in the serge bag, so I lifted him down very gently, and sitting on the floor with the bag in my lap, I attempted to get a teaspoonful of milk near his little nose. But the moment I touched him he *screamed* and sprang out, biting my finger with extraordinary strength as I tried to stop him.

To my horror, he tore up the window curtain with amazing rapidity and attempted to run along the pole, a thing he had not done for many weeks. But his strength gave out, he lost his footing, clung on upside down for a miserable second, then *fell* with a scream upon the hard wooden floor. With a look at me I shall never forget, he dragged himself



(for his hindquarters were now paralyzed) behind the chest of drawers.

I moved the piece of furniture and got him to drag himself out, and with a supreme effort to scramble into his box, which was on a chair close by. When I lifted the lid, a minute or two later, he was dead. He was curled up, with a queer little smile upon his face, as if triumphant that he had defied me to the last, and I—I could only be thankful that his sufferings and his terror were ended.

Ruby's eyes were glazing when I looked at her a little later, and she died quietly half an hour after Peter had breathed his last.

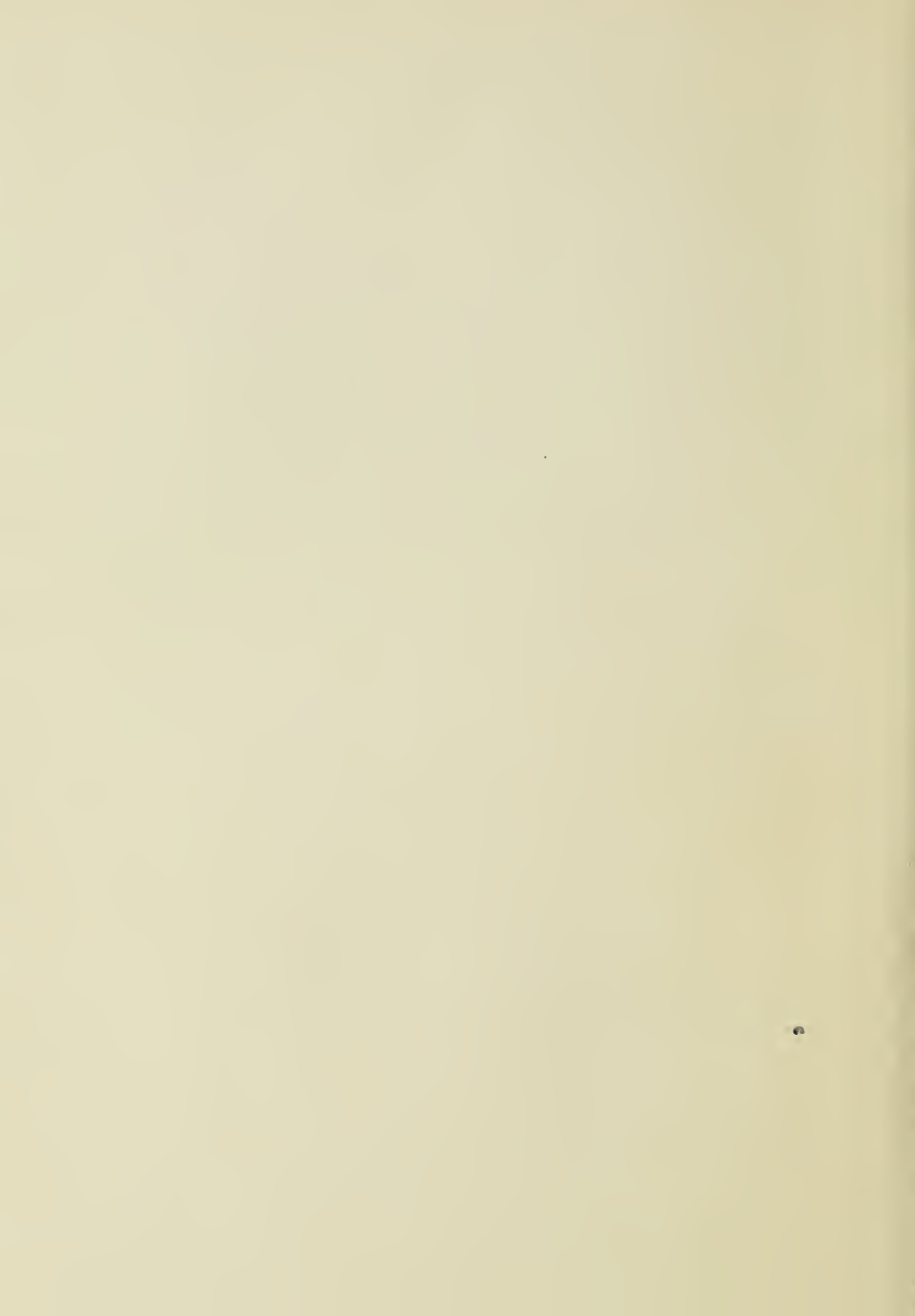
I sent their two little bodies to be post-mortemed to a veterinary college in North London, kindly recommended by the Zoo people. The verdict was that Peter had died of acute congestion of the lungs, and Ruby of pneumonia, complicated by nephritis of some standing.



People who love animals do not need to be told how remorse and grief poisoned my days for some time.

Why had I, in my stupid human misunderstanding, sacrificed these little lives?—changed the existence of these blithe, merry little creatures into dumb, lengthened suffering?

I was glad Peter had bitten me—I deserved it—and I hope it was some satisfaction to him to do it.





(1,852)

Laurence hid himself in the twinkling of an eye.

See page 75.

PART III.
FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS.



FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS.

IT will be remembered that I had obtained another squirrel as a mate for Laurence when he should leave London and come to Hook Heath and freedom. This little creature had arrived on the thirteenth of January; had been kept in the conservatory while the bitter weather lasted; and had been put into the garden squirrel-house on the twenty-eighth of the month. I called her Sulky at first, for she remained so implacably invisible; and, though food disappeared, I never caught a glimpse of

her for a fortnight. She was, as I have said, intended to be a mate for Laurence ; but after Ruby's death I felt she must be given to Fritz, and I must get another little lady for Laurence. So, the day after my little pets died, I opened the door of the squirrel-house, and let the captive free to go where she would.

I had reason to believe, however, that for a week she sneaked back to the squirrel-house every night to sleep ; for nuts put in overnight were gone before 7 a.m., and one morning I saw her slipping down from the sleeping-box to make her breakfast.

I watched her afterwards get out and run along the fence, and then think better of it, and come back and climb up to have another nap.

By midday, however, she was gone, nor did I see her again for more than a fortnight. We had some very stormy weather, with high gales and snow squalls, and I began to fear



that she had got a chill and would die of pneumonia, like poor little Rufina.

How should we ever know? She would creep into one of the deserted nests in the wood, and there gasp out her little life as the two others had done.

The only thing that gave me hope that she was alive and well, though unseen, was Fritz's cheerful behaviour, and the fact of his still remaining in the wood and garden. For it was springtime, and surely, if there had not been some attraction here, he would have been off to the plantations across the heath, where there were plenty of little ladies to be courted. His demeanour when he paid visits to my room—which he did every day—was suggestive of happiness and of amorous thoughts. He would cock his tail roguishly, and skip about and run up the curtains—plainly “showing off.”

I therefore hoped that, though I could not



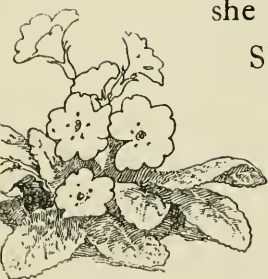
see her, he was aware of Sulky's presence, and was hugging to himself hopes of domestic bliss.

And, sure enough, one bright morning I peeped out at 6 a.m., to see Fritz tearing across the lawn, as fast as his little legs could carry him, towards the stump, where Sulky was boldly cracking nuts, looking exceedingly well and pretty. I saw her lift the cocoanut shell with her little fore paws from off the cob nuts, and she tucked in an excellent breakfast. Fritz, being the gentleman he always was, would not disturb her, but came up the ivy to me, where his antics betokened great happiness.

From that day the name of Sulky was dropped, and became "Mrs. Fritz."

By the 17th March Miss Appleton required Laurence Housman no longer as a model, so she brought him down to me at Hook Heath.

She had secured his sleeping-box (while he



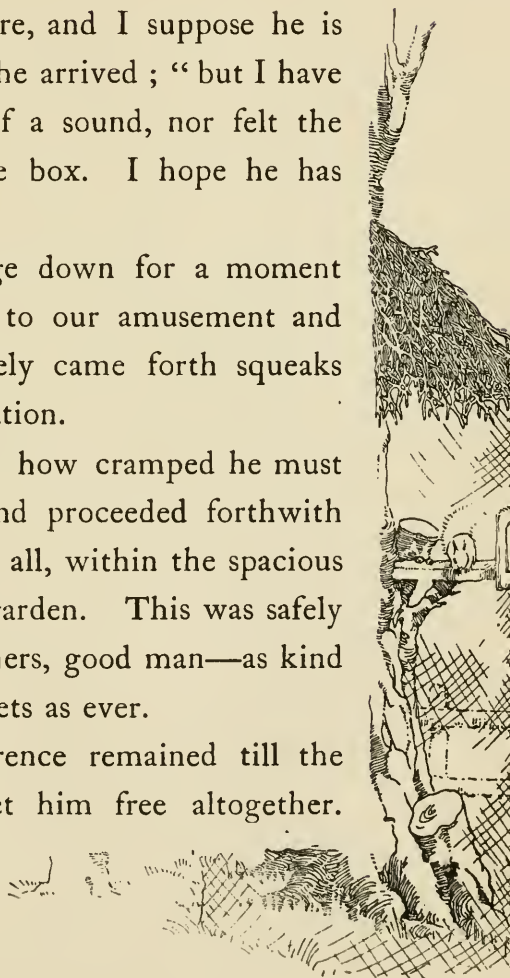
was curled up in it for a nap), wrapped it in thick brown paper, wired it across the holes, and held it in her lap all the time in tubes and train.

“I suppose he is here, and I suppose he is alive,” she said when she arrived; “but I have not heard the ghost of a sound, nor felt the faintest wriggle in the box. I hope he has not died of fright!”

We put the package down for a moment upon the sofa, when, to our amusement and relief, there immediately came forth squeaks and grunts of expostulation.

“Poor little fellow! how cramped he must be,” we exclaimed; and proceeded forthwith to place him, box and all, within the spacious squirrel-house in the garden. This was safely accomplished by Smithers, good man—as kind and interested in my pets as ever.

In this abode Laurence remained till the 2nd May, when I set him free altogether.



But before giving him his liberty I had to get a mate for him, so that there should be no excuse for fights with the masterful Fritz. As Messrs. Devon and Co. took some time before they found what I wanted (for she had to be a German, young, and healthy), Laurence had to remain solitary for a month.

March 1914 was a dreadful month of gales, rain, and snow squalls ; but with the first days of April came spring-like warmth and brilliant sunshine, and the wild squirrels visited the garden again.

One morning the dear little thing, whom I used to call Miss Fritz in the summer of 1913, came dancing and skipping along the fence rails, and I watched her at 6 a.m. from my bedroom window. She climbed the big lime tree to have a look at the little shelf outside my casement, where, as she well remembered, nuts were spread galore in the days of her childhood last year. Yes ! there

they were, and down she ran and made a dash for the wall and the sheltering ivy. Up she scrambled, and in another moment was perched on the extreme corner of the ledge, with her beautiful tail cocked over her back, and an almond clutched in her little claws. She let me stand quite close, not a foot away, with



the window wide open ; and oh ! how pretty and small and dainty she looked to my eyes, accustomed for so many months to the coarser build and shaggier fur of the Germans. Her little face was so appealing and baby-like, her nut-coloured fur so soft, and her tail so fluffy !

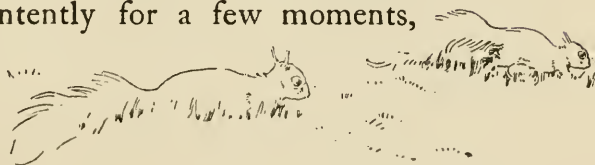
She knew me again quite well ; looked at

me with recognition in her brilliant black eyes; and presently, dropping the empty shell of her almond, she came hesitatingly to the inside ledge of the window, stretching out her nose to sniff at me—to make quite sure that I was in very truth her old friend; and, having satisfied her little mind, she picked up a walnut and concentrated her attention upon it. I stood beside her there for ten minutes, till she had finished all the provender except one cob nut, which she carefully hid in the ivy. Then she raced down to coquette with poor Laurence, who in his garden-cage was doing his wild best to excite her attention. Round and round the wire she darted, sniffing nose to nose with him and “twizzling” her plumy tail. Every now and then I heard squeaks and exclamations. Then they started a sort of hide-and-seek, she outside, he inside. I felt very sorry for him, and longed to let him out; but his peace, let alone his life,

would not have been worth a moment's purchase with Fritz in the wood.

Two days before this, Laurence had got out. The little door of his house, though shut, had not been bolted, and with a sudden burst of summer-like sunshine and high wind the rain-swollen wood had shrunk, and was easily burst open when pressed by his eager paws. I did not see him go. He must have skipped off very early indeed; but about 10 a.m. I happened to be looking out of the window, and was suddenly aware of two hurrying furry forms across the ground. Poor Laurence was tearing for all he was worth towards the shelter of his lately forsaken house, and Fritz was after him, with murder in his eyes.

I clapped my hands and shouted, startling them both and diverting Fritz's attention. He sprang up a tree, and Laurence hid himself in the twinkling of an eye. I saw Master Fritz watching intently for a few moments,



and wrathfully "twisting his tail" (as a young friend of mine puts it). His rival remaining invisible, however, I soon saw him skipping leisurely back along his tree footpath to Mrs. Fritz in the wood.

Half an hour later I perceived Laurence stealthily making his way along the fence towards his house, where nuts were plentifully spread. (I suspect he had not had much of a breakfast.) I fled downstairs and out in time to see his tail drawn neatly through the open door, as he seized a cob nut and sat up to enjoy it. He scarcely noticed me as I bolted him in—only too thankful, I fancy, to find himself once more where were plenty of nuts and no Fritz.

Towards the end of March—to be accurate, on the 22nd—I see in a note in my squirrel diary that Laurence wakened and was busy over his breakfast at 6 a.m., and that Fritz

came along, and, perching on the heather thatch of his house, swore fiercely at him, twisting his tail with rage. He heeded not my call, nor the rattle of nuts on my window sill; but burrowed his nose into the heather, in vain attempts to come to close quarters with his enemy. Laurence swished his tail too, and returned his compliments with interest; but, finding it impossible to fight, he presently turned his back on Fritz and resumed his nut cracking—with a lofty contempt for the other—and Fritz had to come up to me to be fed and consoled.

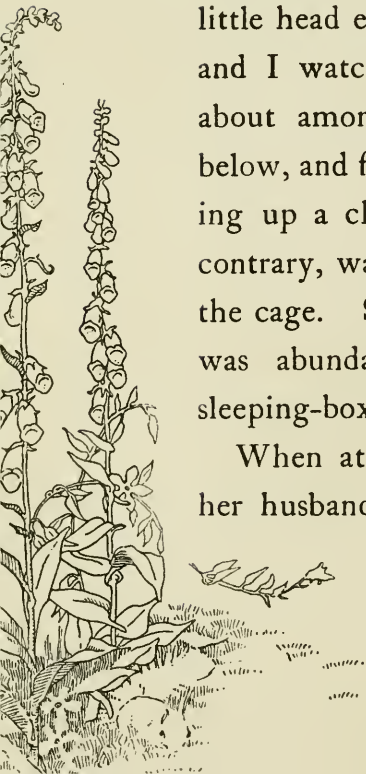
At last Laurence's bride arrived, and as had happened before with the various pairs under observation, she soon took the best of everything. Laurence was turned out of his sleeping-box; she stole all his best nuts; and invariably made him wait till she had finished her meals, leaving only the refuse for him.

She arrived on the seventeenth of April, and

I opened the cage door to set them both free after she had had a fortnight to get used to the sight of the house and the human beings in the garden, and to understand that food and water were always to be found in that particular place.

I also made a little hole in the thatched roof—as squirrels like to have two entrances to their abodes—and Laurence immediately set out to enjoy his liberty. I soon saw his little head emerging from the hole at the top, and I watched his furtive joy as he capered about among the foxgloves and periwinkles below, and finally was lost to my sight clambering up a cherry tree. Mrs. Laurence, on the contrary, was quite a week before she quitted the cage. She preferred to remain where food was abundant, and where her comfortable sleeping-box kept her snug at night.

When at length she did venture forth with her husband into the unknown, she still stole



back for several nights to her safe shelter. But at last, I suppose, they built between them a nest in the wood, for I constantly saw Laurence very busily tearing strips of fibre from the trees just then, and the cage was finally deserted.

Squirrels are very busy in the spring stripping bark for making new nests, and in the summer this is sometimes carried on for re-making and mending the old.

They generally choose damp rainy days for doing this, when the material they gather is full of moisture. Once, however, in a spell of prolonged hot dry weather, I was much struck with a clever device on the part of one of them, probably Fritz.

I found one morning two little bundles of stripped fibre thrust into the jar of drinking water inside the garden squirrel-house. (The entrance to this was always left open, and

the squirrels ran in and out for food and water.)

There was no mistaking these neat little bundles. I had too often watched Bunty, Fritz, Rufina, and Co. not to know the look of them, with the ends tucked in, in the form of a little bolster. I left the packages there, grasping at once that the weather being so dry the fibre had become too stiff and hard to be easily woven, hence the bringing of these bundles to the water and leaving them to soak. They remained there for two or three days, then one was carried off, and a day or two later the second disappeared.

What made the performance more interesting was that this special fibre was only obtained from one particular tree, a certain conifer which grew on the other side of the garden. Fritz had been frequently seen in the spring stripping the fibre from this half-dead tree, the only one of its kind we had.



(1,892)

She coquetted with the birds round the drinking pan.

See page 53.

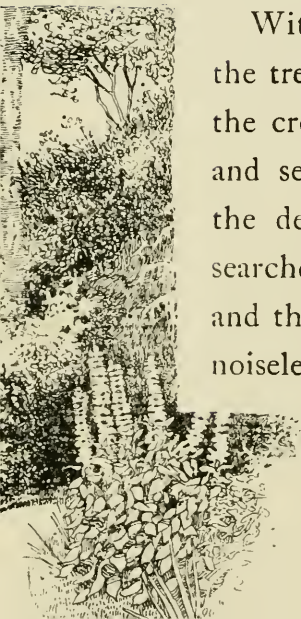
In carrying his little bundles from it to where he placed them to soak, he would pass two birds' drinking pans full of water ; but they were in public places on the lawn, and constantly bathed in by all sorts of birds. Fritz— if it was he, and I very much suspect it was— preferred the comparative secrecy and seclusion of the small water-jar in the squirrel-house in the back garden. His sagacity was justified, for no one meddled with them till he considered them to be sufficiently moistened for weaving purposes.



One hot afternoon under the weeping tree there was coolness and shade. Half drowsily I was reading the Saturday *Westminster*, when I was aware—I can't say I heard it, for it was so slight—but I was aware of a minute noise. It was not the fitful summer breeze swaying the hanging branches of my sanctuary, nor the scratches of birds under the rhododendrons in

a vain quest for worms. I lifted my head very cautiously, and twisted it slowly towards the rough stem of the white-blossomed acacia, twenty feet away. Yes, up in a fork of the branches was a bit of brown fur. Part of it seemed to be quivering incessantly. The tiny noise I heard was the dropping of a nutshell on the grass. The quivering I saw was a little jaw nibbling very fast. Presently there was a flashing movement, and out into the sunshine she came, a beautiful, brilliant foxy red, with a tail which put her husband's to shame, for this was Mrs. Fritz.

With electric jerky motions she came down the tree stem and clawed out another nut from the crevices, and swung head downward easily and securely, her hind feet firmly clenching the deeply-grooved bark. Nut after nut she searched out from where I had hidden them, and then, catching sight of me, she swiftly and noiselessly put herself out of sight.



Presently, as I remained very still, she plucked up more courage and skipped down to the grass. Here for some minutes she coquetted—there is no other word for it—she coquetted with the birds round the drinking pan. After many feints, advancing and retreating, she buried her nose in the cool, sparkling water, and took a long, long drink. Eyeing me through the veil of green which dropped round me, she suddenly made up her frisky mind to dare all and come to the nut tray close to my seat.

She rushed towards me in a tremendous hurry as if afraid of changing her mind again, her tail straight out behind her, and in two seconds was within touching distance of my hand. I kept rigid, and watched out of half-closed eyes. She stood up on her flexible hind feet and reached out a quivering, sniffing little nose in my direction, trembling all over with fear and curiosity. But as the dreaded human

smell reached her moist nostrils, she turned and darted like an arrow under the shelter of a thick rhododendron. Here she hid, and I saw her bright eyes peeping out at me behind the leaves. I still remained motionless, and presently was aware of a noiseless furry form vanishing up the holly tree which leans against some of the outer branches of the beech.

The long hanging green around me shook a moment, and by that I knew that she had jumped from the holly to the beech, and was somewhere above my head. I moved imperceptibly so as to look upwards, and close above me was a little white stomach with a fiery tail cocked over a chestnut back.

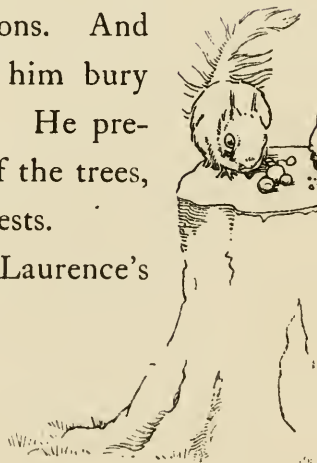
And now she began to scold and stamp her feet and lash her tail; but seeing that I kept calm and moved not an eyelash, she made for the nuts, and sat up within a yard of my chair cracking and devouring them one by one.

I was immensely pleased, as this was the

first time since I let her go three months ago that I had seen Mrs. Fritz so near.

There came a day at the end of June when Fritz brought a son and heir to the nuts on the stump. The stump, I must explain, was near the squirrel-house in the back garden, and was in full view of my window. The youngster was a lovely colour, almost orange, with a smart bushy tail. Fritz at this time was changing his tail, and was a lamentable object in that respect—his spiny little appendix had hardly a hair on it. I was amused at his elderly paterfamilias ways—“twizzling” his bald tail in mock anger, and carefully hiding away several nuts for future occasions. And this reminds me that I never saw him bury his nuts as the Surrey squirrels did. He preferred to hide them in the forks of the trees, or in the ivy, or in deserted birds’ nests.

I have forgotten to say that when Laurence’s



mate arrived in the middle of April it was Smithers who received her, and put her into the squirrel-house in the garden, for I was spending Easter amid the deep green lanes of Devonshire.

There, one hot spring morning, as I was lying on moss and whortleberry, under the shoulder of Mutter's Moor, I watched a wild squirrel running up a larch. It was soon hidden from view in the tree's delicate green branches—and what is more exquisite than the earliest green of the larch? I heard the delicious scrabble of little claws on the bark, while about me droned the big bumble-bees and their quick-working cousins of the hive, all intent on honey-getting. I was puzzled to know where the honey was to be found, till I saw that the whortleberry was full of innumerable tiny crimson bell-flowers.

It was a wonderful Easter. After "the wettest March on record" April came in hot



and brilliant, with a steady east wind that dried up the saturated ground.

In every sheltered valley and “goyle” the trees rushed into leaf. The birch shook out her fairy tassels, and larches lit up the hill-sides with their vivid green lace. Everywhere the busy birds flew in and out of the hedges, intent on nest-making. The rooks cawed from morning to night, the jackdaws “chucked,” and sea-gulls sailed aloft exchanging their wild free calls in the blue. It was a joy to live.



Back in Surrey again after a cold spell—“the tail of winter in the middle of May”—the icy wind dropped, and a still, hot day soothed our ruffled nerves, and warmed our shivering bodies once more. Early one morning wild Miss Tito paid me a second visit. She came to the bedroom window, and allowed me to stand close beside her, while she cracked her favourite Barcelona nuts.

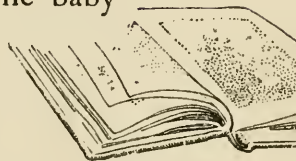
When her back was turned, and her eyes shielded by her lovely tail, I gently unfastened the casement and very slowly pushed it out, holding my breath and body very still, when she quickly jerked round to see what was happening. I then backed quietly into the shadow of the room, having placed more nuts on a chair. Presently, her nut finished, and no more to be found under the inverted coconut in spite of her vigorous nose-pushings, her wee intelligent face peeped inside the casement, two little fore paws appeared, and then she jumped upon the chair to seize a nut—skipping outside again to crack it. I crept back into bed, and lay still. Then she came again, jumped down upon the blue carpet, and executed a sort of *pas seul*—pitter-patter—and back. She had not been inside my room since last September—eight months ago !

Through the autumn and winter I had scarcely seen her, even in the garden. With

Tito and Tara I suppose she had been driven away by the masterful Fritz. As mentioned already, in April she had once reappeared, and had even clambered up the ivy to breakfast at the old place. But this running about in my room to-day showed that she had not forgotten the spring of 1913, when she was such a fearless little visitor that I once caught her, and put her for ten days in the squirrel-house, in a vain attempt to tame her altogether—an attempt which, as I have explained in a former book, completely failed.

To return, however, to this particular morning, she came in and out several times till the nuts were finished, and then took a bit of brown bread in her mouth, and hid it in the curtains before she finally departed. Afterwards I saw her in the lime tree licking her little paws, and cleaning her whiskers assiduously.

“There’s a boy downstairs with some baby



squirrels in his pocket, and he says will you buy one, and he has sold the others already, and will you tell him how to feed them ? ”

This from an excited child who came bounding to my door, the morning holidays began, and we were all going away from home.

I went downstairs and found a bright-eyed, sturdy little chap of nine, who held in his hand a tiny bit of fur, with a fuzzy turned-up tail, and a pair of sharp tufted ears. Putting it on the kitchen table—where it darted about in electric fashion, saved from falling off the edge every minute by eager hands—the boy pulled another, and another, and yet another out of his pockets, and then diving into a basket on the floor, he produced three more. Seven furry infants ! I gasped. The heartlessness of it ! What were the bereaved and distracted parents doing ?

I questioned him wrathfully, as I dashed round the table, with others, to prevent im-

minent catastrophes. The electric movements spread all over the broad surface of the kitchen table.



“Where did you get them?”

“Out in the fir plantations on the heath, Miss. Oi cloimed up a tree and put me ’and in the nestises. Oi let one fall, and ’e doid.”

Some one brought warmed milk in a soup plate, and we placed the seven wee things round it, dipping their noses in, as one does with kittens, to make them lap. Three tackled the food at once ; tiny pink tongues shot out, tiny tails curled comfortably over backs. The others were too feeble, and too young to understand ; they were palpitating, and fell over as fast as they were put upon their four legs. Poor little innocents, taken away far too young from their mothers and their dark, warm nests ! I saw they would not live ; already two were in convulsions.

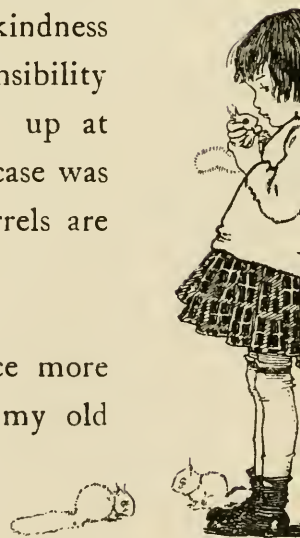
I was furious with the boy. But what was to be done ? He had already sold most of them for a shilling apiece, on condition he reared them for the first week himself. He had heard that I knew all about squirrels, and came to me for instructions about food.

I warned him as emphatically as I knew how against overfeeding, and pointed out the

absolute necessity of plenty of sleep, warmth, and *no* handling. But what was the use? He had seven little brothers and sisters at home. They all wanted to cuddle the squirrels; they all wanted to feed them. Two died that evening, three followed their example next day, and by the day after not one was left alive.

It was impossible for me to have taken them myself. I was going a long journey to friends—whom I love, but whose prime aversion is pet animals! Our house was being shut up, and Smithers, with all his kindness and patience, firmly declined a responsibility in my absence that entailed getting up at 4 a.m. to give food, and that in any case was by no means an easy task. Baby squirrels are notoriously difficult to rear.

Later in the month found me once more established with books and work in my old



summer quarters under the weeping beech on the lawn.

The beech had been, as usual, the last to come out; while larches, limes, and chestnuts had flung open their treasures and burst into spring loveliness almost before the middle of that wonderful April, the beech, still shrinking and coy, had kept her little brown sheaths wrapped tightly round her buds. But by the second week in May, after "Winter's tail" had fled, she hung out all her delicate green; and her swaying tresses swept the turf around me, as I sat alone in the sweetness and promise of yet another spring.



Sparrows, thrushes, and robins were busy feeding young broods; chaffinches and blue tits were still sitting on their eggs; the spotted flycatchers had not yet arrived. Forget-me-nots, violas, and irises made a sea of blue and purple, seen through the pendent branches of my sanctuary. White broom leant over

with its fairy flowerets, and back amongst the evergreens glowed the crimson of early rhododendrons.

Presently there was a scolding and chattering above my head, and I looked up to see Fritz, who had, I suppose, come by his usual overland route along the tree tops, and was minded to come down to the tray at my elbow for nuts. He did not like the look of my rug and cushions, and was apparently trying to stamp at and scold them out of his way. Finding them immovable and harmless, however, he came leaping down for almonds and walnuts, and as I talked to him his nervousness ceased, and we were both happy.

After he had gone came the conscientious robin, who just now was hard at it feeding her newly-fledged young. I helped her, at intervals, all day in the performance of this duty, with currants, oatmeal, and cheese. Scarcely did she allow herself a morsel, so

intent was she upon the needs of her brood. As she waited expectantly for my dole another robin flew down. They did not fight, so I presumed this was a cock, and I watched his antics to attract her with considerable amusement.

First, he sang to her, a little low whispering song, swaying his head and neck to and fro, in an extraordinary manner bowing and sidling.

As, perfectly unconcerned, she continued assiduously picking up invisible insects for her children, he changed his tactics, and, flying to a branch above, he cocked up his tail, and trilled a loud jubilant strain. Nothing moved by this exhibition, she simply ignored him, and he flew away in disgust.

I named him Robin Adair, because the garden was so dull when he was not there, and he became eventually the most persistent little visitor. He caused me to waste no end of





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Seven furry infants! . . . The heartlessness of it!

See page 90.

time, for just as I had settled down in the garden with writing or work, there he would be in an instant, silently arriving out of nowhere.

Perched upon the open lid of my dispatch case, he would eye me with a determined expression there was no mistaking. It said plainly, "Where are my worms? Here I sit till you produce them. Be quick, please; my family is waiting." And I would have to get up, and go inside and bring out the tin which contained his meal-worms. This I would place on my knee, and take up my pen again, meaning really to write. But his dainty little flutterings, his wee spindly legs, his beautiful plumage, and his dew-bright eye were invariably too fascinating and too distracting. I would leave off my writing a hundred times, to admire him and talk to him. He was a most devoted father. He plied to and from the nest where his little ones were

all day long, and when one remembers that a bird's day at this time of year begins at 4 a.m., and lasts till 5 or 6 p.m., it will be admitted that this involves a tremendous amount of energy. Very occasionally did Robin Adair give himself the treat of swallowing one of the meal-worms which he was given. Sometimes the delicious taste of the worm quite demoralized him, and he would gulp down three or even four in succession. But to do him justice, this happened but rarely. I found out where his nest was, and once I commissioned some one else to dole out the worms, while I went behind the shrubbery to watch the little hole, almost indistinguishable, on the ground beneath the furze bushes in the field. He arrived with a fat worm in his beak ; but the expression in his black eyes the moment he saw me so near his home was extremely angry. In a second he flew off and hid. I waited and waited. Then *I* hid, and peered

through the furze ; but though he had hopped upon a twig nearer the nest, he spotted me again instantly, and nothing would induce him to go in. He must have warned his children, too, somehow, for though at other times I had seen four little gaping mouths, all was silence and darkness now.

His cleverness in carrying several worms at once was remarkable, as each had to be killed before it was given to his babies. This entailed a good deal of manipulation with his beak, biting and striking the ground. I have constantly seen him doing this, and finally carrying four worms in a row, to save the trouble of four journeys.

He became absolutely fearless while the very dry weather of June lasted, as all ordinary worms refused to come to the surface of the earth ; and he would have got none at all but for my tin box. Not only would he perch on my shoe, or on the box in my lap, but I





trained him to peck them out of my hand. Currants dipped in oatmeal, cheese, and gingerbread made pleasant changes of diet, and helped to save the worms, or he would have carried off hundreds in the course of the day.

He was always with me, appearing, as I have said, suddenly and swiftly out of nowhere; in whatever part of the garden I placed my chair, there close to me in half a second would be the dapper little creature, trim, neat, and alert. He was never dishevelled like the sparrows, and when in the late afternoon it would seem as if he must be exhausted, he would go and take an energetic bath, and come and sit beside me to dry his feathers.



Sometimes for days together the garden was forsaken by the squirrels; but to make up for their absence, many little episodes of bird life amused me as I sat out of doors in the sun and the wind.



The tits were shameless thieves, and their ingenuity was surprising. I have watched one of these tiny birds manipulating—if one can use such a word in connection with a beak—a cocoanut shell, which had been turned over upon some nuts on purpose to keep them from him. Cob nuts or walnuts he could not tackle, but almonds were not safe from him, and monkey nuts he was determined to have. I saw him mount the cocoanut shell, and with his head on one side peer into the hole at the top. Satisfied that the coveted food was beneath it, he began to try to lift the heavy shell. With his little beak he pecked and pulled manfully at the outside fibre. He could just raise the shell, but not high enough to get what he wanted.

After a good deal of exertion, which only shuffled it about on the stump, he flew off for a minute's rest and reflection. Then he tackled it again, leaning down and pushing

his beak sideways under the edge, pecking valiantly, and every now and then mounting the nut to peer through the hole to make sure that what he wanted was still there.

The stump on which the shell was placed had a sloping surface, and to prevent the squirrels' food from rolling off, a ledge had been put on two sides and across the bottom. Presently I was amazed to see that the small bird had succeeded in wriggling and shuffling the cocoanut till he had tilted it up upon this ledge. Out rolled the monkey nut from beneath, and he flew away with it in triumph. I then heard a vigorous knocking going on, a little way off, and saw him in a shrub banging

the nut against the trunk to break the pod. Having made an opening, he held it firmly



on a branch with one little claw, and feasted royally. This exploit, from the time he first tackled the cocoanut till he got the monkey nut out, took him just a quarter of an hour.

It was during this summer of 1914 that I saw, for the first time in my life, a young cuckoo in a nest.

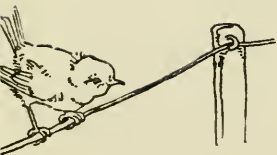
Parting the furze bushes one day I came upon a linnet's nest, moss-built and tiny. There seemed to be a weird sort of an eye looking over the top of it, and I touched the rim. To my amazement half a foot of ruffled black and white shot up like a Jack-in-the-box, and an orange-coloured maw and throat opened wide and hissed angrily. It was quite formidable, and looked enormous compared with its wee foster-parents, but I have no doubt they were immensely proud of it. We had a tennis tournament that day, and I think about fifty young people must have



visited the furze bush. The excitement could not have been very good for the poor creature. For the next two days he remained dull and sleepy, and entirely declined to shoot himself up, or even to open his lovely orange mouth. The third day found him flown. The little mossy cup was empty—and time too, I should say ; with such a swelling bulk, I wonder the walls had not burst.

I think we may disabuse our minds of the traditional belief in the wickedness of the cuckoo *mère*, and of the supposed grief and distress of the youngster's foster-parents. It seems to me much more likely that, instead of considering it a misfortune to find a cuckoo's egg in their nests, our British birds only hope for such luck, and swell with pride as they rear a magnificent chick, under the delusion that it is their own.

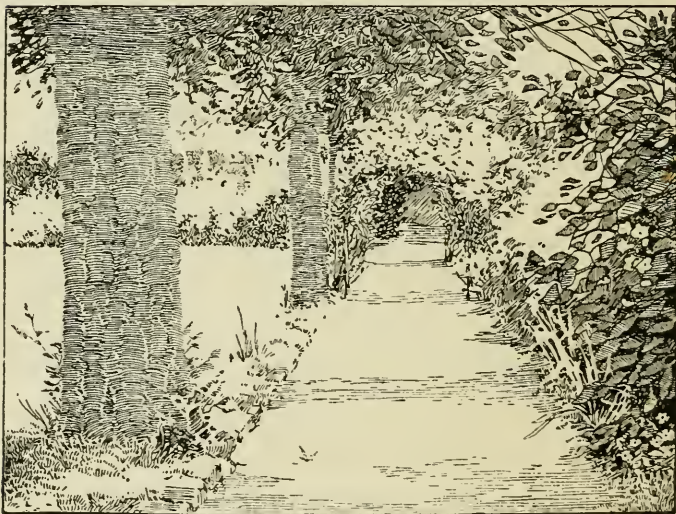
One very hot morning in June I was the



interested spectator of a mother tit showing her offspring how to bathe. The family party were unaware of my presence. There were five young hopefuls—all sons, I should imagine, for they were bigger than their active little mother. All had been born and reared in a “Brent Valley Bird Sanctuary” nesting-box, on a holly tree close by. The mother’s darker, more pronounced colouring, longer tail, and determined expression of countenance betrayed her matronhood. The children were delicious balls of pale green and gray, with tiny black markings, and their innocent and timid little faces were fascinating as they clustered round the large earthenware saucer, full of water, in which the mother was splashing.

Her energy was astounding. She flapped and ducked and soused herself till she had not a dry feather, then flew out and told them to go in. Not a bit of it! The little cowards

hopped upon the saucer's edge, stooped till their beaks touched the water, then turned right about face, and looked gravely at their claws. They flew or hopped across the saucer



many times, but had not courage to plunge in. Back flew the mother, hustled them away, and launched herself once more. They watched her, and then began to imitate her movements

—in the grass! The lawn just there was thickly covered with fallen blossoms from a white acacia, as also was the water in the saucer. The babies ducked and quivered their wings, and bent up and down, and quirked imaginary drops of water over their little backs. Out flew the mother, and perched on a foxglove stalk, and into the water went a siskin, and thoroughly enjoyed himself—but not for long; back came the mother tit, routed him, and called to her little ones not to be outdone by a siskin. She ducked and splashed, and twinkled and sprinkled all over again, till she was a drenched little object; but beyond crouching near her, so as to catch some of her splashings on themselves, not one of her children had nerve enough to take a bath that morning. The last that I saw of them, they were all five crouching and busily imitating her movements amongst the grass and acacia blossoms; their shrill little voices,

could I have understood them, were probably calling out :

“ We are trying, mother ! we are indeed ! Look at us ! We’re doing just what you do ! ”

On the tenth of June, to my joy, my pretty turtle-doves appeared again. I called them my Bible doves—

*“ As the wings of a dove covered with silver,
And her pinions with yellow gold.”*

For there is a silvery sheen about them, and a glint of gold in their plumage.

This was the third summer that they had come to the garden and nested in the wood. Such delicate lovely creatures ! They came to drink, and to pick up the small corn which I scattered for them every day on the lawn.

The lovely fawn colour of their breasts, melting into lavender on their heads, the blue

and black bars on their necks, their ruby eyes, and dainty rose-coloured feet were a joy to behold—a feast of exquisite colouring.

They were very shy, and, on their first arrival, the sight or sound of a human being made them instantly take fright ; but as time



went on they became accustomed to me, and would, as long as I kept still, approach quite close to my chair.

Though I searched the wood many times I never could find their nest. It was well hidden.

* * * * *

And now autumn is approaching, with its splendour of amber and gold, of crimson and brown. There is great activity in the squirrel world. Young and old are busy storing and burying nuts.

Early in the dewy mornings they hie themselves to the hazel coppices, to the lordly beeches, and later they will strip the walnuts. Active little creatures, intent upon this their supreme instinct, I have known a pair entirely clear away the beech-mast under the weeping tree on our lawn on a September morning before breakfast—beech-mast which thickly covered the ground the night before.

Fritz and Laurence Housman, too, are now disporting the full glory of their autumn tails. Mrs. Fritz and Mrs. Laurence are teaching the little Fritzes and the little Laurences where and how to hide the winter food. Soon they will be stripping the fibre from the old conifer in the shrubbery, and mending up

their snug little homes in the wood, ready for the short days and the long cold nights.

Good-bye, gay and care-free little friends !
Good-bye ! My way lies south, by the sea,
where no squirrels come.

FINIS.







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More about the squirrels

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