Hollowdell Grange

Holiday Hours in a Country Home

by George Manville Fenn, 1831-1909

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Chapter 1

A Fish out of Water.

IT WAS such a fine hot Midsummer day at Hollowdell station, that the porter had grown tired of teasing the truck-driver's dog, and fallen fast asleep—an example which the dog had tried to follow, but could not, because there was only one shady spot within the station-gates, and that had been taken possession of by the porter; so the poor dog had tried first one place, and then another, but they were all so hot and stifling, and the flies kept buzzing about him so teasingly, that

he grew quite cross, and barked and snapped so at the tiresome insects, that at last he woke Jem Barnes, the porter, who got up, stretched himself, yawned very rudely and loudly, and then, looking in at the station-clock, he saw that the 2:30 train from London was nearly due, so he made up his mind not to go to sleep again until it had passed.

It *was* a hot day—so hot that the great black tarpaulins over the goods-waggons were quite soft, and came off all black upon Jem Barnes's hands. The air down the road seemed to quiver and dance over the white chalky dust; while all the leaves upon the trees, and the grass in the meadows, drooped beneath the heat of the sun. As to the river, it shone like a band of silver as it wound in and out, and here and there; and when you looked you could see the reflection of the great dragon-flies as they flitted and raced about over the glassy surface. The reeds on the bank were quite motionless; while, out in the middle, the fat old chub could be seen basking in the sunshine, wagging their great broad fantails in the sluggish stream, too lazy even to snap up the flies that passed over their heads. All along the shallows the roach and dace lay in shoals, flashing about, every now and then, in the transparent water like gleams of silver light. Down in the meadows, where the ponds were, and the shady trees grew, the cows were so hot that they stood up to their knees in the muddy water, chewing their grass with half-shut eyes, and whisking their long tails about to keep the flies at a distance. But it was of no use to whisk, for every now and then a nasty, spiteful, hungry fly would get on some poor cow's back, creep beneath the hair, and force its horny trunk into the skin so sharply, that the poor animal would burst out into a doleful lowing, and, sticking its tail up, go galloping and plunging through the meadow in such a clumsy way as only a cow can display. A few fields off the grass was being cut, and the sharp scythes of the mowers went tearing through the tall, rich, green crop, and laid it low in long rows as the men, with their regular strokes, went down the long meadows. Every now and then, too, they would make the wood-side re-echo with the musical ringing sound of the scythes, as the gritty rubbers glided over the keen edges of the bright tools.

Hot, hot, hot!—how the sun glowed in the bright blue sky! and how the down train puffed and panted, while the heat of the weather made even the steam from the funnel transparent as it streamed backwards over the engine's green back! The driver and stoker were melting, for they had the great roaring fire of the engine just in front of them, and the sun scorching their backs; the guard was hot with stopping at so many stations, and putting out so much luggage; while the passengers, in the carriages said they were almost stifled, and looked out with longing eyes at the shady green woods they passed. One passenger in particular, a sharp-featured and rather sallow youth about twelve years old, kept looking at the time-table, and wondering how long it would be before he arrived at Hollowdell, for that was the name printed upon the ticket Fred Morris held in his hand.

But just at this time there were other people travelling towards Hollowdell station, and that too by the long dusty chalky road that came through the woods and over the wooden bridge right up to the railway crossing; and these people were no others than Fred Morris's country cousins, and the old man-servant—half groom, half gardener—who was driving the pony chaise with Harry Inglis by his side, while Fred's other cousin Philip was cantering along upon his donkey close

behind—such a donkey! with thin legs, and a thin tail that he kept closely tucked in between the hind pair, as if he was afraid the crupper would pull it off. He wanted no beating, although he could be obstinate enough when he liked, and refuse to pass the green paddock where he grazed; but he wanted no beating, while with his young master on his back: he would trot off with his little hoofs going pitter-patter, twinkle-twinkle over the road, at a rate that it used to puzzle old Dumpling, the fat pony, to keep up with.

Harry and Philip Inglis were rather different-looking boys to their cousin, for, stouter in build, they bore upon their good-tempered faces the brown marks made by many a summer's sun. And now, upon this occasion, they were all impatience to get to the station to meet Cousin Fred, who was coming down to spend the Midsummer holidays. The visit had been long talked about, and now the boys were in a state of the greatest excitement lest any disappointment might take place.

"Oh! do drive faster, Sam," said Harry, making a snatch at the reins; "I know he'll be there first. Tiresome old thing, you! Why didn't you start an hour sooner?"

"What for?" said Sam, grumbling, and holding tightly to the reins; "what was I to come an hour sooner for? Think I don't know how long it takes to drive over to station?"

"But," said Philip, from his donkey, "I'm sure we shall be late. There!" he continued, "I can hear the train now!"

"Nonsense!" said Sam. "Where's the steam? Why, you can see the steam for two miles before the train gets in, and Dumps here could get in long before the train."

But Philip was right, for just then the loud and shrill whistle of the engine was heard as it started again, after setting down one solitary little passenger in the shape of Fred Morris, who looked sadly disappointed to find no one there to receive him but Jem Barnes, the porter, who stared very hard at the young stranger from Lunnun.

Dumpling galloped, and Neddy went off at a double trot, upon hearing the railway-whistle, spinning along at such a rate that before Fred Morris had learned which path he was to take across the fields to go the shortest way to Squire Inglis's, of the Grange, Hollowdell—and all of which information he was getting very slowly out of Jem Barnes—Harry had jumped out of the chaise. Philip leaped off his donkey, and they were one on each side of Fred, heartily shaking hands with him.

"I say, ain't you our cousin?" said Harry, breathlessly.

"Our cousin from London, you know," said Philip, "that was to come by this train?"

"My name is Morris," said the traveller, rather pompously, "and I'm going on a visit to Mr Inglis's at Hollowdell."

"Yes, to be sure!" said Harry. "You're Cousin Fred, and I'm Harry, and that's Phil. Come along into the chaise. Here Sam—Jem! bring the box and let's be off. But I say, Fred, isn't it hot?"

Fred replied that it was, seeming hardly to know what to make of the rough, hearty manners of his cousins, and he looked, if anything, rather disappointed when he was met by the rough grin of Sam, who was of anything but a smooth exterior, and altogether a very different man to his father's well-brushed livery-servant, who had seen him safely off to the station in the morning.

“I’ve come,” said Fred at last, when they were fairly started with Philip and Fred in the chaise, and Harry this time upon the donkey bringing up the rear—“I’ve come because Papa said you would not like it if I did not; but I’d much rather you had both come up to me in London. One can find something to do there, and there’s something to see. I can’t think how you people manage to live down here.”

“Oh! we find something to do, don’t we, Harry?” said Philip, laughing. But Harry was very busy with Neddy, who had taken it into his head to go down a lane which led to the pound—a place where he had been more than once locked up; and it was as much as ever the lad could do to stop him; so Philip’s question remained unanswered. “I say,” continued Philip at last, after they had been conversing some time, during which Master Fred had been cross-questioning Philip as to his educational knowledge, and giving that young gentleman to understand what a high position he occupied at Saint Paul’s School—“I say,” said Philip, “can you swim?”

“No,” replied Fred.

“Can you play cricket?”

“No,” said Fred.

“Fish, row, shoot, rat, and all that sort of thing?” said Philip.

“No!” said the other. “I have always lived in London, where we do not practise that class of amusement.”

“Oh! come, then,” said Philip, “we shall be able to teach you something. Only wait a bit, and you’ll see how we live down here. But here we are; and there’s Papa waiting for us under the porch.”

As Philip said this, Sam had crawled down from his seat, opened a swing gate, and led the pony into a garden through which wound a carriage drive up to a long low house, all along the front of which extended a verandah, the supports and sloping roof being completely covered with roses, clematis, and jasmine, which hung in the wildest profusion amongst the light trellis-work, and then ran up the sides of the bedroom windows, peeping in at the lattice panes, and seeming to be in competition with the ivy as to which should do most towards covering up the brickwork of the pretty place; for it really was a pretty place,—so pretty, that even Fred, who thought that there was nothing anywhere to compare with London, could not help casting admiring looks around him. All along one side of the gravel drive there was a tall, smoothly-clipped hedge of laurels; while on the left the velvet lawn, dotted all over with beds of scarlet geranium, verbena, and calceolaria, with here and there rustic vases brimming over with blooming creepers, swept down in a slope towards the park-like fields, from which it was separated by a light ring fence. Right in front was another mighty laurel hedge, that looked to be almost centuries old; and on the other side was what was called the kitchen garden, though, I think, it might have been called the parlour garden just as rightly, from the rich banquets it used to supply of all kinds of luscious fruits—peaches, nectarines, plums, strawberries, apples, pears, currants; and as to gooseberries, the trees used to be so loaded with great rough golden and crimson fellows, that they would lay their branches down on the ground to rest them, because the weight was greater than they could bear. But the greatest beauty of the house at Hollowdell, or, as it was called in the neighbourhood, “The Grange,” was the ivy, which did not creep there, but ran, and ran all over the

place—sides, roof, and all—even twining, and twisting, and growing right up amongst the two great old-fashioned chimney-stacks, round the pots, and some shoots even drooping in them, and getting black and dry amongst the smoke that came curling and wreathing out. For Squire Inglis would not have the ivy cut anywhere excepting in the front, where he used to superintend while Sam cleared it away now and then, so as to give the roses and creeping plants a chance to show their beauties in the bright summer-time. And there the Grange stood, with flowers blooming around it in every direction, as sweet and pretty a place as could welcome any one just come from the great desert of bricks and mortar called London, in which people who are not compelled are so foolish as to go and spend their time in the sunniest and brightest days of the year.

And, as Philip said, there stood Papa beneath the porch; and directly after there stood Mamma too, to welcome their sister's child, whom they had not seen since he was almost a baby.

"Now, boys," said the Squire, after all the handshaking had been finished, "I've nothing to do with this. Fred is your visitor for a month, so I leave you to make him happy and comfortable, and mind you see that he enjoys himself."

Philip and Harry promised readily enough that they would. "But, Papa," said Harry, "Dr Edwards said, when we broke up, that we were to do a little work every day during the holidays, and—and—"

"And what?" said his father. "Eh, now," said he, good-humouredly; "I think I can make a good guess at what you would like. You'd like me to write to the Doctor to let you off, wouldn't you?"

"Oh! yes, yes, yes, Papa," shouted the boys, clapping their hands. "Hurrah, that's capital!"

"Well, but would it be right?" said their father, seriously.

"Oh! yes, Papa," said Harry; "for we will do so much after the holidays, and work ever so hard to make up for it; and it is so very, very hard to learn lessons away from school. I never can get on half so well, for one can't help thinking of the games we want to play at, and then one don't feel to be obliged to learn, and it does make such a difference: so do please write, there's a good, good father," said Harry, coaxingly.

The Squire laughed, and that laugh was quite sufficient to satisfy the lads, who gave two or three frisks, and tossed their caps in the air; when Philip's fell on the top of the verandah, and had to be hooked down with a long hay-rake.

Dinner was nearly ready, so Fred followed his box up to the pretty little bedroom he was to occupy—one which opened out of the room set apart for Harry and Philip; and soon after he was down in the dining-room eating a meal that called forth the remarks and comparisons of his cousins, who were dreadful trencher-men. They told him that he must learn what a country appetite meant, and so, by way of teaching him, they dragged him off, as soon as dinner was over, to look at all the wonders of the place. First over the flower-garden, and round by the aviary, where Mamma's gold and silver pheasants were kept; and then into the green-house, where Poll, the parrot, hung in her great gilt cage, swinging about amongst the flowers, dancing up and down, and shrieking out whenever anybody came by; then swaying backwards and forwards in the ring in the cage, and climbing up and down all over the bars, this way and that way, head up and head down, and

all the time looking as wicked and cunning as a hook-beaked old grey parrot can look.

"Sam, Sam, where's the master?" shouted Poll, in a reedy-weedy tone, like a cracked clarionet, as soon as the lads came in sight. "Stealing the grapes. Stealing the grapes," she shouted again. "Rogues, rogues, rogues! Two in the morning, hi! hi!" And then she gave a shrill whistle, and burst out into a loud hearty laugh, that made Fred stare, it was so natural.

"There," said Philip, proudly, "you haven't got such birds as that in London."

"Oh yes, we have," said Fred, "but Papa don't care about buying them. Poor Polly," he continued, putting his finger in to stroke the parrot.

"Don't do that," shouted the boys together; but it was too late, for almost at the same moment Fred gave utterance to a most doleful "Oh–h–h!" Poll had made a snap at his finger, and hooked a piece of flesh out sufficient to make it bleed pretty freely.

"What a beast!" said Fred, angrily, and binding his handkerchief round the place; "I'd kill it if I had my way."

"But it was your fault," said Harry, quietly, "for trying to touch it; wasn't it?"

"Ah! but he didn't know it would bite," said Philip, "or he would not have done so: but never mind, come along, and let's go down the garden."

The abundance of the fruit made Fred forget his pain; and, having seen the boys' gardens, the next thing was to have a look at the little pond with the rock-work fountain, which they had made, and which played by means of a barrel of water hid in the shrubbery behind, the stream being conveyed through a piece of small piping. Here it was that Harry and Philip kept all the finny treasures they captured, and the little pond was rich in carp, roach, dace, and perch; while, amongst other valuables, Fred was informed of the existence of an eel a foot long, which had been put in two months before, and never seen since, but was no doubt fattening in the mud at the bottom.

Neddy had been seen, but round in the stable-yard there was Dick, the terrier, who could catch rats, rabbits, or anything, so Harry said; and then there was Tib, the one-eyed, one-winged raven, which hopped about with his head on one side, and barked at the visitors, and then began to dig his beak into Fred's leg, and could only be kept at a distance by Philip poking at him with the handle of the stable broom, when he hopped off, and sat upon the dog-kennel, every now and then giving a short angry bark; but nothing like such a bark as Dick the terrier gave when he found that, in spite of all his leaping, whining, and howling, he was not to be let out that afternoon, but left straining at the end of his chain, with his eyes starting out of his head, while the boys went to see Harry's pigeons and Philip's rabbits.

Just then Harry went to a box in the stable, and pulled out a long, lithe, scratching and twisting thing, that looked more like a short snake than a quadruped, and offered it to Philip to hold.

"No; I won't hold it," said Philip; "I'm afraid of it. Perhaps Fred will."

"No, that I won't," said Fred, shrinking back; "I never saw such a nasty-looking thing in my life. What do you keep it for?"

"Keep it for? you cowards," said Harry, stuffing the animal into his pocket; "you'll see to-morrow, when we are off rabbiting: why, it's the best ferret for miles

round." And Harry really believed it was, for the old keeper that he bought it of had told him so, which was quite enough for Harry; but although it was such a good ferret, it had a nasty habit of stopping in a hole as long as it liked, which was sometimes very tiresome when any one was waiting outside upon a cold cutting day.

"Well, I wouldn't touch it for sixpence," said Fred; "but I ain't afraid, only I don't want to be bitten again by any of your nasty country bumpkin things, else I'd touch it fast enough."

"I never do," said Philip; "I hate it, it twines about so. It's worse than an eel ever so much."

"Hark at Mrs Phil," said Harry, grinning. "I say, Fred, he is such a coward; worse than you are a great deal."

"I'm not a coward," said Fred, colouring up, and setting his teeth.

"Oh yes, you are!" said Harry, teasing him; "why, all you London boys are cowards. I wouldn't be a Londoner for ever so much."

And then, as if prompted by a mischievous inclination, he pulled out the ferret, and pitched it right upon Fred's shoulders as he stood with his back half turned. Fred gave a cry of fear and anger, and darting at Harry, struck him full in the face a blow that made him stagger backwards.

In a moment Harry recovered himself, and rushed at his assailant; and while Philip, pale and breathless, looked on, the two boys pummelled away at each other like the bitterest enemies.

From the very offset the struggle was all in favour of Harry, for he was of a stronger and sturdier build than his cousin; but it was not until Harry's nose was bleeding, and Fred's lug cut, and they had been up and down half-a-dozen times, that Fred gave in, evidently bitterly humbled and mortified at his conquest, and suffering more from his defeat than from the pain of the blows he had received.

"Come here inside the stable, Fred," said Philip, half in a whisper, and with the tears brimming in his eyes. "Come in here and wash your face and hands; I'll pump some water." Saying which the boy fetched some water in the stable pail, and, giving a reproachful look at his brother, took it into the stable where Fred was sitting upon a truss of straw, trying manfully to choke down a sob which sadly wanted to gain a vent.

"I'm so sorry, Fred," he said, dipping his handkerchief into the pail, and bathing his cousin's blood-besmeared countenance. "I can't think how Harry could do so. Oh! what would Papa say if he came? Pray don't tell him."

"No, I shan't tell," said Fred, stoutly, with his face half in the pail, and the words all the time half choked by that sob which would keep rising from his overburdened heart. "But I'm not a coward, though, am I? Is my face cut much?"

Upon inspection it proved that with the exception of the damaged lip, and an ugly cut on the back of his head where he had fallen upon the paving stones in the yard, Fred was not much hurt; and when Philip had well rubbed down his clothes, and polished him off with Sam's spoke-brush, the marks of the conflict were hardly perceptible.

Just then Harry came sneaking into the stable, looking dreadfully ashamed of himself, with his face smeared all over with blood from his bleeding nose, and carrying in his hand the body of the poor ferret: for it would frighten no more poor

rats or rabbits to death, having met with its own by being trampled upon during the fray.

"Will you shake hands?" said Harry, half sulkily, half sheepishly, to Fred.

Fred gave a sort of gulp, but he held out his hand, which was heartily shaken; and directly after Harry was sitting on the truss of straw, and being sponged and cleaned by his late adversary and his brother.

"I say, you know," said Harry, "I am sorry, but you shouldn't have hit me; no fellow could stand that. But then I was wrong first I say, though, don't be hard on a fellow, for I do want to be jolly with you, and make you comfortable; but I'm such a vicious beast, and always getting into a row, ain't I, Phil?"

Phil nodded assent, but added directly after, "He won't let any one crow over me, though, at school, and he whacked Bill Sims, the biggest chap in the first class last half, for hitting a little un."

"But I say, though," said Harry, wiping his face with his pocket handkerchief, "it's all right again, ain't it? We've made it up again, haven't we?"

"Yes, to be sure," said Fred, smiling. "But who killed the poor ferret?"

"Why, you did," said Harry; "you put your foot on his head; but it serves me right, it was all my fault."

"Never mind, now," said Philip; "let's go down the garden again till tea-time; there's a linnet's nest in the hedge."

"Ah! so there is," said Harry; "come on."

And away they went, for the storm had blown over, and to have looked at the lads no one could have imagined that the slightest disagreement had occurred to mar the harmony of their afternoon.

As they went down the garden Harry fetched a spade from the tool-shed; and when the little patch that he owned was reached, the boy, with something very like a tear in each eye, dug a hole, and laid his ferret in it, and had just filled it in when they were summoned to tea; but they did not go until the spade was put away, and they had shaken hands all round in the tool-house, and vowed friendship for evermore.

Chapter 2

Old Sam—Catching the Carp.

"COME, FRED, get up, it's such jolly weather. Make haste, and then we can go down the garden before breakfast," said Harry, the next morning.

"Aw-aw-yaw-aw-aw," said Fred, gaping dreadfully, and so sleepily that he forgot to place his hand before his mouth.

"Oh! come, I say, that won't do down in the country; here, it's seven o'clock, and we're going to have such a stinging hot day. Do get up and dress. There is Phil down the garden now."

"Ah-aw-aw—yes, I'll get up," said Fred, yawning again. "But what early folks you are; we don't get up so soon at home. What time do you have breakfast?"

“Eight o’clock, and Papa never waits for anybody; so make haste down, or we shan’t have time to do anything before it’s breakfast bell.”

“I want some hot water,” said Fred, grumpily.

“What for?” said Harry.

“Why, to wash in, of course,” said Fred.

“Ho! ho! ho!” burst out Harry, laughing, “hot water to wash with in July! Why, we never use any all through the winter, when it’s ever so cold, and the jugs get frozen over. You try cold water, it’s ever so much better, and makes you have red cheeks like Phil’s.”

“Hi, hallo-o-o!” shouted somebody front out of doors.

“There’s Phil,” said Harry, going to the window and throwing it open, when in came gushing the sweet morning air, laden with the dew sweetness of a thousand flowers. The roses and jasmine nodded round the casement, and from almost every tree within reach of hearing, right down to the coppice, came ringing forth the merry morning songs of the birds.

“Oh!” said Fred, in a burst of admiration as he went to the window, half dressed; “oh! isn’t it beautiful? I never thought the country half so pretty. I wish I had got up sooner.”

“Do you?” said Harry. “Won’t we have you up, then, to-morrow morning! But only look; Phil has found an old ‘bottle washer.’ Do make haste and come down, and we’ll put him in the ferret’s cage.”

“Oh! do stop,” said Fred, splashing his face about in the cold water, and hurrying to get finished; “do stop for me, there’s a good fellow.”

Five minutes after the three lads were together upon the lawn, rolling a prickly, spiky hedgehog over and over in the vain hope of getting him to open out and show his black, bright little eyes, and sharp piggy like snout; all which time old Sam was busy at work, making his keen bright scythe shave off the little yellow-eyed daisies that seemed sprinkled all over the green turf that was so soft and elastic to the feet.

“Chinkle chingle, chinkle chingle,” rang out the scythe, as he held it over his shoulder, and sharpened it with his gritty rubber, and then again shave, shave, shave, over the velvet grass, till long rows of the little strands lay across the lawn.

A comical old fellow was Sam, and he used to say that no one loved the young masters so well as he did; but somehow or another Sam never used to see them out in the garden without finding something to grumble about. His complaints were generally without foundation; but Sam used to think he had cause to complain; and, being rather an old man, he used to consider he had a right so to do.

“Now then, Master Harry, you’re at it again! What’s the use of my trying to keep the garden nice if you will keep racing about over it like that? I wish you’d keep indoors, I do.”

“We ain’t going to, though, are we, Phil?” said Harry, laughing. “Old Sam would be sure to fetch us out again if we did; wouldn’t you, Sam?”

Old Sam grinned, and shook his head, and just then eight o’clock struck by the village church, which was about a mile off, so Sam wiped his scythe, and, shouldering it, walked off to his breakfast, just as a cheery cry of—“Now, boys,”

came from out of the verandah, where Mr and Mrs Inglis were standing, watching the lads upon the lawn.

The pretty breakfast-room looked so bright and cheerful; there was such an odorous bunch of dew-wet roses in a vase; such sweet scents, too, came through the open window, and such country farm-house bounty spread upon the breakfast-table, that Fred told his cousins after the meal that he had never enjoyed anything before half so well in his life.

"Now, boys, what are you going to do to-day?" said Mr Inglis.

"Going fishing, Papa, in Trencher Pond," said Harry.

"Why, there's nothing there worth catching," said Mr Inglis.

"Oh yes, Papa!" said Phil. "It's full of sticklebacks, and such beauties! Some are all gold and green and scarlet; the most beautiful little creatures you ever saw, and it is so easy to catch them; and, besides, it is so pretty there now."

"Oh, very well!" said their father; "only I've got leave for you to fish in Lord Copsedale's lake next week."

"Hooray!" said Harry; "that's capital."

After breakfast Fred was all in a state of ferment to be off to Trencher Pond. All was new to him, for he did not even know what a stickleback might be, and he longed to see some of these gorgeous fellows that were all over "gold and green and scarlet." They were not long in getting equipped for their trip, for Harry soon produced three willow wands, some twine, worms, and a tin can to hold the spoil; and, thus provided, away they started, with the full understanding that their dinner would be ready at one o'clock precisely.

They had only about a mile to walk down a green lane, and then to turn off on the little common which contained the pond, but that mile took a long time to get over, there was so much to do, to see, and to listen to; there was the hole where the wasps had a nest to look at; there were the nimble squirrels to watch as they darted across the road, and, scampering up the trees, peeped down at the visitors to their domains. Ah, how Fred longed to have one of the little bushy-tailed fellows, as he watched their nimble tricks, scampering and leaping from bough to bough as easily and fearlessly as a cat would upon the ground. Then there were so many pretty wildflowers in the banks and hedge-rows; so many birds to learn the names of, for they were all strangers to Fred, who only knew sparrows—and they were different to the sparrows down here at Hollowdell—and canaries and parrots. There was a hedge-sparrow's nest, too, to peep at, with its tiny little blue eggs; but not to touch, for, though Fred wanted to take it, Harry and Phil said "No;" for Papa did not approve of the birds being disturbed. Then there was a beautifully-formed mossy little cup-shaped nest in the fork of a tree, just inside the coppice, smooth, round, and soft-edged, with the horsehair and wool lining all plaited together, and made as even as possible. It was so low down that, by bending the branch, the boys could look at it, which they did, while the poor chaffinches, in the horse-chestnut tree close by, cried "pink-pink-pink" in a state of the greatest alarm lest their work should be destroyed; and the pretty cock bird, with his crested head, pinky breast, and white-marked wings, burst out into a loud and joyous song, short but sweet, as the three young travellers journeyed on. And what a horse-chestnut tree that was all one mass of pinky white blossoms, the tree itself one mighty green pyramid of graceful leaves, and then, from top to bottom, hundreds

and hundreds of the blossom-spikes standing like little floral trees themselves; while from every part of it came a continuous hum, as the bees and other insects rifled the honeyed treasures and bore them away.

"Oh!" at last burst out Fred, in perfect rapture; "oh! don't I wish Mamma and Papa were here! I never did know how beautiful the country was."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed his cousins, each holding one of his hands; "come along, that's nothing to what we are going to show you."

And away they raced through the gate, and across the little common to the pond in the corner, where the golden furze-bushes hung over the side.

Philip was right: it was a pretty pond. Such water—clear, bright, and deep, with all kinds of water-plants growing therein; golden lilies, silvery water buttercups, tall reeds, short thin rushes with their little cottony tufts, taller ones with brown tassels; and stout bulrushes, with their brown pokery seed-stems, growing tantalisingly out of reach. Such silvery bright smooth water, with bright blue beetles skimming about over the surface; and that skating spider that skims about over water with his long legs as easily as if it were ice, without giving a thought as to the possibility of sinking. Then down in the clear depths where Fred was peering, every now and then boatman beetles could be seen rowing about with their little pairs of oars, lying upon their backs to make boats of themselves—curious little fellows that by night come out of the water, and, opening a pair of cases, send out a bright and beautiful pair of wings, and fly about through the air till the morning.

"Oh! look at the little crocodiles!" cried Fred, to the intense delight of his cousins, as the showily-dressed newts went sailing easily through the clear water, with waving crests and lithe tails—such gay little fellows, with orange throats; while swimming about in chase of one another by myriads were the sticklebacks, of which the lads had come in quest.

Darting about over the pond were hundreds of dragon-flies, thin-bodied blue or green fellows, with bright transparent wings, that seemed invisible at times, so rapid was their vibration; while every now and then, rustling upon the wing as they dashed about in chase of one another, came the larger dragon-flies, to make brighter the scene.

And now began the fishing—fishing without hooks; for the voracious little sticklebacks seized the worm as soon as it was dropped into the pond, sometimes two together, one at each end, so that the tin can the boys had brought soon had several dozens of the fish inside. The first to draw out a painted "tiddler" was Fred, and a gorgeous little fellow it was, with a throat of the most brilliant scarlet, shaded off into orange; while gold and green of the most dazzling lustres shone in the sun.

"Mind his prickles!" cried Harry, by way of warning to Fred; but it was too late, for poor Fred's fingers were already bleeding from the effects of the spines with which the fish bristled.

Fred was in a high state of delight, and, novice though he was in fishing, he succeeded in pulling out nearly as many as his cousins. Both he and Philip fished by means of tying a piece of twine round the middle of a worm, and letting the ends dangle down; but Harry had brought a float and line, and secured his worm by hooking one end of it.

The sport grew fast and furious, and might have been continued for any length of time, but for a sudden alarm that was raised respecting worms, for Harry had just abstracted the last unfortunate wriggler from the tin box.

"Never mind," said Philip, "I'll soon find some more;" and he directly set to work, pulling up tufts of grass and kicking down pieces of the bank wherever it looked at all damp; but all in vain, not a worm could he find; and he was just about giving up his task in despair, when a shout from Harry took his attention.

"Here, come here!" said Harry, "I've got such a thumper."

Fred and Philip both ran up to him, and sure enough he seemed to have got hold of a "thumper," as he called it, for his line was running about backwards and forwards through the water, while the willow wand which served him for a rod was bent half double.

"Pull him to the side, and I'll get hold of the line," said Philip.

"But he won't come," said Harry, trying to play his fish to the bank, but without success, for just then it made a dart right out towards the middle of the pond. Harry's wand bent more and more, and, just as the greatest strain occurred, the line divided about two feet above the float, the wand gave a smart rebound, and poor Harry, the picture of disappointment, stood with a short piece of line waving about at the end of his stick, gazing woefully after his lost fish.

"Oh—oh—oh—h—h!" groaned Philip and Fred together, "what a pity!"

Harry continued to look most rueful, but said nothing.

"It must have been a jack," said Philip. "What a big one! Why didn't you pull it out when I told you?"

"How could I," said Harry, "when it was dragging so?"

"I am sorry," said Fred; "it must have been a great stickleback to pull the line in half."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the cousins, "it wasn't a stickler. They never grow any bigger than these."

"Look! look!" said Fred, pointing to something that was bobbing up and down in the pond, "there's Harry's floater."

"So there is," said Harry; "perhaps it will come in close enough to get hold of."

But, instead of coming in any closer, the little coloured cork kept working away towards a deep, dark-looking part, right under a large beech-tree, whose arms hung over that portion of the pond.

"Get up the tree, Hal," said Philip, "and creep along that bough. You'll get it then."

"No, don't," said Fred, "you'll fall in; I'm sure you will. Don't, pray don't," he continued, as Harry ran towards the tree.

"I shan't fall," said Harry; "don't you be a goose. I've climbed harder trees than that, haven't I, Phil?"

"I should think so," said Philip; "but don't go too far, Hal, so as to get in, for it's ever so deep there!"

"All right," said Harry; "give me a bump up."

Philip laid hold of his brother's leg, and gave him a lift just as he grasped the tree with both arms, and then, taking advantage of the inequalities of the bark with his boots, Harry managed to climb slowly and laboriously to where the tree forked, and the branch reached forth from the parent stem over the deep pool,

while Fred stood half aghast at what seemed to him the most daring act he ever beheld.

"Oh! take care," he exclaimed, looking quite pale, while the palms of his hands grew moist and hot with excitement.

"I'm all right," said Harry, creeping slowly out upon the branch; and then, seating himself astride, he began to work himself out over the water, while the bough quivered and bent at every movement. "Can you see it, Phil?" said the adventurer. "Just under the bough, now, and coming nearer. It's gone!" he exclaimed, in dismay, as the float sank down out of sight. "But keep on, Harry; perhaps it will come up again."

Harry kept on till he was about twenty feet away from the trunk of the tree, and about three feet from the surface of the water, and then sat watching where Philip threw a stone at the place where the float disappeared. He could see some distance down into the black-looking water, which report said was here ten feet deep; there were weeds and dead branches sticking up here and there, but no float, and no fish.

"It's of no use; do come back," said Fred, "or I know you will fall."

"Whoof!" said Harry, giving himself a kind of jump, so that the bough swung up and down, and his feet dipped the water, while his head nearly rose to the branch above him. "Here's such a jolly ride; come and have a turn, boys."

"Pray don't," said Fred, "I know you'll fall." And then—but not in obedience to Fred's request—Harry became motionless; for just beneath his feet he saw, rising from the depth of the pond, the white top of his float. Fred gave a half shriek at what he saw, for to him it seemed a feat of unsurpassed daring, as Harry clasped the bough with his legs, and swinging himself head downwards, he plunged his hands into the water and grasped his truant line.

There was a moment's struggle, for the fish was still at the end, but it was beaten: and the effort of keeping the cork-float down so long, and its previous struggles, made it an easy prey. Tightly twisting the line round his finger, Harry swung himself up again, and began carefully to make the retrograde journey after the manner of a sloth, with his back downwards, and arms and legs clasping the bough. The small twigs and branches made this no easy task, but, to the great delight and admiration of Fred, he soon reached the tree, where he passed the line to Philip, who was elevated in his turn by Fred, till he could reach Harry's extended hand.

"Now you won't pull him out till I come down," said Harry.

"Oh, no," said Philip.

"Honour bright," said Harry.

"Honour bright," said Philip.

Then, and only then, did the climber loose his hold of the line and proceed to make his descent. He contrived to get into the fork of the tree, and then let himself down until he hung by his hands, and tried to clasp the trunk with his legs, but somehow or other the tree seemed to keep gliding away from him, and the more he tried the more tired he grew, till at last his hands slipped, and down he came upon the ground in a sitting position.

Happily, the distance was only small, and there was too much excitement awaiting him for Harry to spare time for anything more than a terrible grimace.

“Now, then,” he said, taking hold of the line and drawing it gently, “look out, boys,” and then, with his beautiful golden scales glittering in the sun, and his strength completely gone, a carp of about a pound and a half weight rose to the surface, and, turning on his side, was drawn inshore.

“Now hold the line, and I’ll land him,” said Harry to his brother, who took his post while the speaker went down upon his knees to grasp the fish.

“Flip, flap, plish, plash,” went the carp, when Harry’s hand came in contact with its shiny sides.

“Oh!” groaned all the boys, “he’s gone;” for the fish was free from the line, the hook having, broken out of his mouth.

But he was not quite gone, for he lay in a shallow on some weeds, feebly opening and shutting his gills. The next flap of his tail, however, would have taken him into deep water, but in went Harry into the mud up to his knees, and with one scoop of his hand sent the golden treasure flying out on to the grass, yards away from the pond edge.

Didn’t they cheer, and didn’t Harry dance about, on the grass with his black muddy legs dripping about, and the water going “suck, suck,” in his boots, and squeezing out at every step. How they gloated over the poor panting prize; so much, that it was ever so long before they could stop to rub Harry’s legs down with bunches of grass; and it was no easy matter for Fred and Philip to do, for the wet boy kept dancing, and cheering, and skipping about like a mad thing, slapping his brother’s back; and at last, when they were half finished—

“Bring the tiddlers along, and let’s keep carpy alive,” he shouted; and running to the edge of the pond, soaked his handkerchief therein, wrapped up the carp, and away they all ran homewards, to put the fish in their little pond. Philip, who was carrying the can of little fish—which had now become almost insignificant in the eyes of their captors—kept splashing his legs at every step, till they were nearly as wet as his brother’s; while Fred, who bore the rods, had to stop more than once to disentangle the lines from the overhanging branches as they went down the lane.

At last they reached home, to find Mary carrying in the dinner, after Mr Inglis had been waiting about an hour for the truants, and at last, exhausted in patience, had ordered it in.

“Look! look! Papa, Mamma,” shouted Harry, rushing in through the French window; “look, here’s a fish!”

“Soak, soak,” went his boots as he went in.

“Take him outside,” said his father to the two other boys, who were just coming breathlessly in, only Fred was entangled by the rods crossing the window. “Take him outside, the young rascal is spoiling the carpet with his wet boots.”

It was no use to think of dinner then, so Papa and Mamma both had to come outside the window to see and admire the carp, and hear how it was captured, before the mid-day meal could be gone on with.

“Ah!” said the Squire at last, “there used to be plenty of fine carp in Trencher Pond down the deep hole under the tree, but I did not know there were any left, for the dry summers killed them when the railway cutting was made and took off so much water. But come, boys, dinner.”

And then he drove them off, and made them enter the hall-door so as to make themselves fit for the repast that awaited them. But he was not quite successful,

for Harry made a double, and ran off to pop his carp in the pond, but was back directly, and shortly after in the dining-room, feasting away with a country boy's appetite—an appetite, too, that Fred already began to show symptoms of possessing, as the fruit of his visit to Hollowdell.

Chapter 3

Indoor Amusements.

DINNER HAD not been finished above an hour before the sky became overcast; and, all at once, a rushing, sweeping wind came over the country. Far-off in the distance where the hills could be seen, a thick, misty appearance almost hid them from sight. There was a low, muttering sound, then another, seemingly nearer; then came a dazzling blue flash of lightning that made all the party stationed at the dining-room window start back; and then came a long, rolling, rattling peal of thunder, that sounded as though it had come bellowing through great metal pipes; while before it had died away in the distance, splashing and plunging down came the rain in torrents, ploughing up the flower-beds, and making little rivers run along each side of the gravel-walks. Out in the home-fields the cows and horses were running to get under shelter of the trees, and looked evidently frightened as flash succeeded flash of lightning, and peal after peal of thunder seemed to make the very heavens vibrate as they rolled round and round, east, west, north, and south. The rain kept streaming down so fast that out of doors seemed one great watery mist that could have been almost swum through.

All at once, just in the middle of a clap of thunder, Mary, the housemaid, opened the dining-room door, and hurriedly said something, but what no one could tell, for her voice was drowned by the rumbling peal.

"Oh! my poor verbenas," said Mrs Inglis.

"Oh! won't this fill up the carp-pond, jolly!" said Harry.

"Come in, Mary," said Mrs Inglis; "what's the matter? Are all the upstairs windows shut?"

"Oh! yes, mem," said Mary; "but the drain's stopped in the yard, and Dick's kennel's floating, and the water's all coming into the kitchen."

"Oh! come and see," said Harry; and away the whole party went, to be just in time to see the water taking its departure, and Dick's kennel wrecked, down by the gates where the yard was highest, for Old Sam, in spite of the pelting rain, was punching away at the sink-hole with the stump of an old birch broom, and the water was rushing down it like a little maelstrom; while the bits of straw and twigs that floated near, represented the unfortunate vessels that get caught in that famous whirlpool.

And still the rain kept pelting down, although the lightning ceased to flash, and the thunder grew more and more distant, till it could only be heard to mutter occasionally afar off. And still the rain kept pouring down, even after cook had made up a roaring fire and wiped up all the water, trundling her mop outside the

scullery door till it seemed to go off like a wet firework, as she spun and twisted it upon her great red arms. And still it kept raining, after cook had smeared mason's dust all over the stone floor with the wet mop, and when it had dried up and the floor looked beautiful and white—white like the clean dresser and table that cook used to scrub with soap and sand as though she meant to scrub all the top off. And still it kept on raining, till tea was brought in, and the urn hissed and sputtered upon the table, and at last it became very plain that there would be no more going out that night, to the great disappointment of the boys; for though in London Fred hardly went out at all except for a walk, yet now the liberty of the morning made him feel like a caged bird, and a melancholy feeling seemed to come over all three boys as they sat watching the leaden sky, the dripping leaves, the beaten down flowers, the sandbanks by the walks, and the great drops of water that formed upon the edge of the verandah and porch, and then came down plash upon the stone pavement.

"Oh! come along," said Harry at last; "I know what we'll do."

"What?" said Philip and Fred together.

"Oh! come along, you'll see," said the other.

Mrs Inglis was busy over some needlework, and the Squire deep in a book, so the boys slipped out of the room without any notice being taken, and perhaps half an hour passed away, when all of a sudden Mrs Inglis dropped her work and jumped out of her chair, while the Squire, leaping up, overturned his little reading-table, and with it the screened candle-lamp, breaking the glass and setting fire to the green crimped shade.

"Whatever is the matter?" said the Squire, when he had extinguished the burning paper; "whatever is the matter?" he continued, as they heard another scream similar to one that had caused the first start.

Mrs Inglis ran out of the room, and through the passage into the kitchen, from whence the sound seemed to have proceeded; and, on entering, there stood cook upon the dresser, while Mary, having knocked off the brass kitchen candlestick on to the floor, was balancing herself upon the top of the little round table, which creaked and groaned and threatened to break with the weight that had been put upon it.

"What's the matter?" said Mrs Inglis.

"Oh! do look, mem," said cook, "do look; there it goes again!"

And Mrs Inglis herself started, for a gritting, grinding, scraping noise was heard, and then by the light of the fire she saw one of the large tin dish covers go creeping along the kitchen floor, till it reached the wall underneath the place where it generally hung.

Mrs Inglis could not help feeling a little startled, but, knowing well that some trick must have been played, she told Mary to get down and pick up the cover and hang it in its place.

"Oh! please 'm, I dussn't," said Mary.

"Then I must," said Mrs Inglis, and stepping across the kitchen, she lifted up the cover, when out popped the great black tom cat, that was generally toasting his back before the fire, but who now seemed dreadfully put out with being shut up so long under such an unpleasant prison-house.

Just then an uncontrollable burst of merriment came ringing out of the passage, where it was all dark; which gave Mrs Inglis a very good clue as to who were the authors of the mischief.

The next morning at breakfast time all the trees, flowers, buds, lawns, and hedge-rows looked soaking wet, and the rain kept pouring down,—not so heavily, certainly, as on the previous night, but quite enough to do away with all prospect of going out that day.

"A bad job, as there's so much hay down," said Mr Inglis; "but I think it will be fine again to-morrow, and it will swell out the corn beautifully."

"But how wet it will be," said Philip, "when it leaves off raining! We shan't be able to play."

"Oh, yes, you will," said his father. "Why, boys, you ought to go down to the mill early to-morrow morning. Old Peagrim will have had the fish-traps open to-night, for the river will be flooded, and then you will be able to see some sport,—that is if it leaves off raining."

"Oh! that will be capital," said Harry; who then had to enter into a long dissertation, explaining to Fred what a fish-trap was; and how watermills went round; and which was the dam, and the tail, and the waste-water, and all the rest of it. After this they helped the Squire to arrange his cabinet of birds' eggs; and Fred learned the difference between sparrows' eggs, and finches', and tits', and larks', etc, from the tiniest tom-tit's egg right up to that of the wild swan, which had been known to breed in the marsh, five miles from Hollowdell; and so interested did the boys get with the work they had in hand, that the dinner-bell rang before they could believe it was more than half-past eleven.

After dinner there was the vivarium to clean out in the conservatory; and a nice job it was, for there were the globes and glass jars to bring full of clean water, and the gold fish to catch with the little net, and to place in the globes; all of which duties Mr Inglis set the boys to do, while he superintended. Then there was the syphon to draw all the water off into the pails, which Sam had to come and empty; and this syphon puzzled Fred a great deal, for he could not understand how the water could run up, and then down the other side.

"Well, but," said Mr Inglis, "have you not learnt that at school in your lessons on physics? Do you not know that it is by atmospheric pressure; the air being exhausted from the pipe, the water is forced through?"

Fred said he had learned all these things, but never understood them well. And then, when the water was all drawn off, there was no end of little, things to pop into the glass jars of clean water. Snails, and beetles, and caddis worms; newts, frogs, toads, tadpoles, tiny crayfish, and about a dozen tiny eels; while the grandest fellow in the whole glass kingdom was a little jack, about five inches long, who wouldn't be caught in the net, but dodged round the rock-work, and had at last to be taken out by hand. Then the bottom was all renewed with fresh gravel and stones; fresh-water plants put in; and all the inhabitants restored to their glass home to dash about with delight; while, as soon as he felt himself in fresh-water, a great mussel, that lay down at the side, put out his pretty white mantle; the snails began sailing up and down, and the water spiders began to pop in and out among the fresh plants and weave webs, just as if they were out of the water,

and did not have to carry their supply of air down in a bright silvery-looking bubble attached to their bodies.

Mr Inglis said he had hard work with all his pets, for they were so fond of eating one another, and the jack was the worst of the whole party, and always in mischief; but he was such a handsome green and gold fellow, and so tame, that he could not be turned out, even though he bit off the tiny gold fish's tail one day, and made him so bad that he died.

So what with getting the aquarium to rights, assisting to rearrange the plants in the conservatory, and helping to water them, so that they should not be teased by seeing the rain fall outside whilst they were kept dry within doors, it got to be tea-time; and, dull as the day had been, Fred declared he had enjoyed it wonderfully, and only wanted tea to be over for Mr Inglis to fulfil his promise, and show them the pictures of the sea anemones, and the other wondrous things that were found on the seashore, where they were to go one afternoon before Fred went back.

Mr Inglis used to say that he liked his boys to learn scientific things, but not after the fashion of parrots; so he used to bring before their notice the wonders of animal and vegetable life, that are spread around us waiting to be noticed; and then, in reply to their questions, give them the information they sought. The consequence was, that the lads gained a vast amount of information through having their interest excited, and what they learned in this way was never forgotten.

Chapter 4

Visiting the Fish-Traps.

FRED'S FIRST act the next morning on waking, which he did before six, was to jump out of bed and ran to the window. It was dull, certainly, and a great heavy mist was rising from the soaked earth; but the ram had ceased, and there were hopes that it might turn out a fine day. Having satisfied himself upon this point, he went on tiptoe to his cousins' room, where the lads were in their beds, one on each side of the window, fast asleep, and looking as though they would not wake up for another hour.

Fred was so proud of his achievement in being up first that he stood for a moment considering what he should do, when, pulling a piece of string from his pocket, he wetted it in the jug, and, twisting up one end, proceeded to tickle Harry's nose with the soft point. Harry gave a vicious rub at the irritated organ, and then another, and another, but without opening his eyes. Fred then drew the string gently over eyes, cheeks, and forehead, making the tormented boy twist and turn in his bed, muttering something about "bothering flies." The next place of attack was the ear, which was directly protected by the insertion of one of Harry's fingers; so that Fred was obliged to return to the nose again, all the time hardly driven to keep from laughing aloud; and this time he titillated the poor fellow so

unmercifully that he burst out with a violent sneeze, and sitting up in bed was face to face with his tormentor.

"Er-tchishew, er-tchishew!" said Harry, bouncing out of bed with his pillow in his hand. "Phil! Phil!" he shouted, "here's a trespasser."

Philip jumped up and followed his brother's example, and between the two poor Fred got so bolstered, or rather pillowed, that he was fain to cry out for mercy, just as a sharp rapping at the wall told the boys that they had disturbed the Squire.

Directly after breakfast the lads started to go to the mill, which was the property of Mr Inglis, but held by one of his tenants, Mr Pollard.

"Oh! he has got such a rum fellow there for a man," said Harry; "we call him Dusty Bob; but he's such a good chap, and will tell you all sorts of tales about catching fish in mills; for he's always lived in watermills ever since he was a boy. But his proper name's Peagrim."

The anxiety to see the "rum fellow"—Dusty Bob—made the boys hurry on, but there were again so many attractions by the wayside that stoppages were very frequent. The sandy roads had soaked up all the rain, but on every leaf and spray heavy dew-drops were hanging and glittering in the morning sun; while the birds were singing as though to make up for lost time. The road wound, along by the old mossy palings which bounded Mr Inglis's property, and the grove on the other side seemed to be the special resort of all the sweetest warblers in that part of the country. On every sunny bit of paling the flies were buzzing and humming; beetles and little sun-shiners were crawling about; while great variegated spiders were mending their nets, ready for the trade they hoped to do in flies on that bright July day.

Such a scent came up from the freshened earth; and bright and golden green looked every leaf, washed clear of the dust that had rested upon it a day or two before; while the hedge-side flowers, although nodding with the watery weight they bore, had turned their opening petals to the sun, and seemed to laugh out their welcome to his warm bright beams.

"There goes a peacock-eye," said Philip, dashing after a lovely butterfly, which kept on gently just before him for a time, and then settled nicely in reach upon a robin-run-rake by the hedge-side. Philip stole cautiously forward, cap in hand, and then made a dab down to secure the brightly-painted prize; but, with one or two flaps from those gorgeous wings, it was out of reach, over the palings, and away across the buttercup-gilded meadow on the other side.

Directly after, Harry was off after a great sulphur-coloured butterfly, which led him a long chase down the lane—Fred joining in at first, but afterwards taking up a chase on his own account after a large blue dragon fly. The butterflies would not be caught that morning, but the chase had one good effect, for it led the lads down to the banks of the little river, now very full and muddy in its waters, which were rushing along with great haste, and evidently in a hurry to get down to the mill, and go tumbling and foaming over the muddy sluice at the head of the waste-water. The tops of the reeds were nearly covered, and in some places the water was out over the road; while down where the foot-plank crossed the wide ditch that brought down the waters from Beaker Hill to empty into the river, the water had risen so that it touched the board, and supplied capital amusement to Harry,

who danced in the middle of it, sending the water flashing and splashing about in all directions, and wetting everything around but himself.

At last he grew tired, and Philip crossed too, but Fred hardly dared venture, for the board was muddy and slippery, and at last Harry had to come back and half lead him over; but it was a new feat to him. And now they reached the mill, which stood upon a little island right in the river—an island that stretched up the stream right to a point, with a stout post driven in to break the force of the river, which now seemed quite angry at being divided, and rushed round on both sides, foaming and roaring as though it was determined to carry island, mill, and everything else away.

"Come along, Fred," said Harry; but Fred felt nervous; it was all new to him, and he could hardly summon up courage to cross the frail bridge over the foaming waters that rushed down the sluice, and formed a cataract on the other side—the waters plunging down in a muddy torrent, and then boiling up in the maddest way. But he grasped his cousin's hand tightly, and, crossing the bridge, walked round the mill to the other side. And now he could feel the whole place tremble and vibrate as the water rushed under the dark arches to the mill wheels, which were going swiftly round; while inside the tall wooden building, pair after pair of stones were spinning round and round, turning the hard, firm corn into white nutritious flour.

Philip led the way, and they entered the mill, where the warning bells were ringing to give notice that the corn was flowing down rightly; and the mill-hoppers kept on "ruttle, ruttle;" the water hissed, seethed, and rushed under their feet; the millstones rumbled round and round; and there on the top of the sacks, with which the place was half filled, sat the two great white cats belonging to the miller, fast asleep; while in a corner, upon a heap of empty corn bags, sat Dusty Bob himself, nodding and nodding as though he meant to shake his head off.

"Hallo, Bob, hoy!" shouted Harry in a voice which was hardly heard above the din in the mill.

"Hullo!" said Bob, gruffly, jumping up. "Oh, it's you, young masters, is it? Well, I expect I've been asleep. I was up half the night, for we were so busy, and had so much water."

"Here's our cousin from London; and Papa said we might bring him to see the fish-traps; and he said you were to have that for showing us," said Philip, pulling out a shilling from his pocket; which action made Bob's eyes twinkle, and removed all sleepiness.

"Stop a minute, young genelmen," said he, going to a cupboard in a corner, and taking out a black teapot—at least what should have been black, but it was all over flour. "There," he said, "that's what I always keeps there to drink when too much dust gets down my throat." Saying which Bob took a long drink of cold tea out of the spout, and then generously offered it to all the visitors, who declared that it was such a little time since they had had breakfast that they would rather not.

"More left for me then," said Bob; "and now for the fish-traps. I opened them last night, but I forgot to look this morning; so you're just right, my lads—just right. Shouldn't wonder if there was a whale down in the big trap after all this water; should you, Master Harry, eh?"

“None of your gammon, Bob. Think I don’t know better than that? Why don’t you come and look at the traps?”

“’Cos I ain’t in such a hurry as you are,” replied Bob. “You’d like me to run, wouldn’t you, eh?”

“Do come, Bob,” said Philip, putting in his appeal to the rough and dusty object before him—an appeal not without its effect, for Bob gave a very dusty smile; and then, reaching down a bunch of keys from a nail in the wall, proceeded with one of them to open a door which led down a dark flight of damp stairs to the under regions of the mill, where the two great toothed wheels were swiftly revolving—dripping with water, and looking horribly wet, slimy, and muddy; while between them, and on each side, were what Harry had called the fish-traps: large contrivances of strong laths about half an inch apart, forming very wide and deep cages, down into which, in a torrent, the water rushed and passed through—of course leaving therein everything in the shape of fish that had been brought down by the swiftly speeding current.

At the first sight of the gloomy cellar-like place and the sound of the rushing stream, mingled with the hollow cavernous plashing noise of the water running from the wheels as they rose from out the deep well-like chasms where they did their duty, Fred shrunk back and hardly liked to descend; but, seeing how coolly and confidently his cousins went down, he summoned up courage and followed, while Bob proceeded to inspect trap number one.

“Well! that’s a pretty go,” said Bob; “shan’t catch many fish that a way, anyhow.”

“Why, what’s the matter?” said Harry, looking at the great wooden fish cage.

“Matter!” said Bob; “why, some one’s left the door open.”

“I know who it was,” said Harry, laughing, as he inspected the opening at the bottom of the trap, through which everything that had entered must have escaped. “I know who it was,” said Harry, again.

“Who?” said Philip, innocently.

“Who? why, old Bob!”

“You are right,” said Bob, grinning. “I did leave it open, because some one came in the mill, and then I had to go. Never mind, I couldn’t help forgetting to come down again, could I?”

On going to the next trap they found that the force of the water had broken two of the bottom laths away, leaving room for any sized fish to get out; but for all that there was a great black-backed slimy-looking monster of an eel, nearly a yard long, gently gliding about over one side of the cage, close to the hole.

“Now, Bob,” said Harry, “here he is, such a stomper; get him out quick.”

But Bob did not get him out quick, for upon the first touch of the barred door, the eel gave a glide, went through the broken bottom of the trap, and was gone.

“Oh—oh—oh!” chorused the boys, “what a pity!”

“Why didn’t you be quicker, Bob?” said Harry, “I know I could have caught him. How jolly tiresome! Do be careful next time.”

“Why, wasn’t I careful?” said Bob. “There ain’t a slipperier thing anywheres, than one of them big eels. There ain’t no holding of them at all when there are no holes in the bottom of the traps; and of course I couldn’t stop that un without any salt to put on his tail.”

“Don’t talk such stuff,” said Philip; “we are not children, and you don’t think we believe all that rubbish about salt on tails, do you?”

Bob indulged in a long low chuckle, and then led the way to the last trap under the mill, though there was one at the head of the waste-water outside. It was very dark in the corner where they now went, but in spite of the darkness the boys could see the silvery gleam of something moving behind the bars, while Bob suddenly grinned out—

“Now then, young gents, here they are; but stop while I fetches a pail.”

Bob went upon his errand, and slowly ascended the steps that led into the mill, while the boys crept as close as possible to the trap, through which the water was rushing swiftly. It was very evident that there were several good-sized fish in; but while they looked, something seemed to dart down from above, there was a great splashing and flapping about, and then it grew pretty evident that a new-comer had joined the prisoners—who had all commenced bobbing and flopping about, as though to remonstrate against his arrival.

And now came Bob with a great pail, which he held under the sliding door of the trap, telling Harry to pull it open. He did so, and into it glided the pailful of different kinds of fish, while one monster of an eel got half his body over the side and slipped out on to the damp floor, where he began to wriggle and twist, evidently meaning to get down one of the wheel channels. But Bob had seen one fine fellow slip away that morning, and did not mean to lose this one; for he knew it would be worth shillings to him, either to sell, or to send by his young visitors up to Squire Inglis’s; so at it he dashed, nearly upsetting the pail as he hastily banged it down. And now began a regular battle, the eel making for the water, and the eel-catcher keeping him away. It was one of those monsters that are rarely caught by hook and line, but which lie in the deep muddy holes of rivers, out of which places they mostly sally when there is a flood.

Strong! it was as strong, Bob said, as a horse, and writhed and twisted about so that he could not retain his grasp upon its slippery shiny skin.

Twice he got it up in a corner, tight up against the brick wall, and away it went again close to the water’s edge and was nearly lost, but for a lucky kick from Harry which saved it. No one else cared about touching the monster, and at last it appeared as though the prize would escape after all, for Bob was trying to retain it with one hand only—the other appearing to be disabled in some way or another; but it was not so, for Bob meant mischief, and his hand reappeared with his great bread and cheese knife, which he opened with his teeth, and then, with one great gash, nearly severed the unfortunate eel’s head from his snaky body.

“There!” said Bob, triumphantly; “that are the biggest eel I ever caught in this here water. Why, he weighs six pound, I know he do. Shut the door of that ere trap again, Master Harry, and there’ll be some more to-night, I know.”

Saying this, Bob made a commotion in the pail by laying his great prize on the top of the other captives, and then carried them all carefully up into the mill, where the visitors proceeded to gloat over the spoil.

Two or three sacks were laid upon the mill floor, and then Bob emptied the pail, and there they were, flapping, leaping, and writhing about; such a collection of fish as would have made any angler glow and feel proud to carry home. First there was the great eel—such a monster, with body as thick as Bob’s wrist: then there

was a beautiful trout about two pounds' weight; a little jack about half the size; about two dozen of fine roach; and about thirty eels of all sizes—one so small, that the wonder was that he had not got through the bars; and the largest so big, that it would have almost passed for the big one's brother; while all of them seemed to consider that it was their duty to get off the sacks as soon as possible, and therefore wriggled and twisted towards the edges, giving the boys plenty of occupation to turn them back, which Fred did with a piece of stick, wisely keeping the uncouth creatures at a distance.

"Now, what's to be done with them all?" said Bob.

"I should like to have the little jack to put in our pond," said Harry.

"Why, he'd kill all the roach," said Philip.

"So he would," said his brother; "but then he's a nicer-looking fellow than any there."

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Bob, "we'll put the six biggest eels and the trout into a basket, and you shall take 'em home—young jack and all; and them tothers I shall send up into the village to sell."

This was considered to be a capital arrangement; and soon after, off the boys started with their basket tied tightly down to keep the eels from getting out during the journey. Fred declined to help carry on account of the eels, so Harry and Philip took a handle each and swung it between them—a nice easy way for them, but very uncomfortable for the poor eels, for every now and then Master Harry would swing so hard that the basket would make a complete revolution, twist Philip's wrist, and, making him leave go, the basket would come down bump upon the gravel path. On they went, however, till they came to the little plank bridge, over which Fred tripped lightly; and stood on the other side, laughing, out of the reach of any splashing that Harry might feel disposed to favour him with.

The water had sunk a few inches lower during their visit to the mill; and when Harry and Philip stood in the middle of the plank, which could not of course be passed without having a splash, Harry began to spring up and down, and the board being tolerably elastic, he and his brother had a pretty good ride; but although there was double weight now upon it, the plank would not touch the water.

"Try again, Phil," said Harry. And up and down went the brothers for a minute, but still clear of the water.

"Come along, now," said Philip, "it's no use."

"One more try, and a good one," said Harry; and then they began again. "Now," he continued, "both together. One: that was a good one. Two: better still. Three: and a—"

"Snap."

Just as they gave the last spring, there was a sharp crack from the plank; a shriek from all the boys simultaneously; and Harry and Philip were struggling in the deep water, for the plank bridge had divided in two just in the centre.

Fred ran to the edge, and, by kneeling down, managed to catch Philip's hand, which was the only portion of him visible, as he was being swept out of the broad ditch, which was running swiftly, into the river, for fear and excitement had robbed him of his swimming powers; while Harry, who could swim well, had given two or three strokes, and then, catching the long grass, climbed out upon the

opposite side. The next thing they all did was to stand and stare at each other in blank amazement, from which Harry was the first to recover, for he jumped about, shook himself like a Newfoundland dog, and then said bluntly:—

"Don't you cry, Phil, we're quite wet enough. Never mind; Papa won't be very cross if we go and tell him directly. I'm coming across now," and in spite of the protestations of Philip and Fred, he got sloth fashion—hanging hands and legs—upon the pole that had served as a hand rail to the broken plank, and which maintained its own bearings, and in spite of its bending beneath his weight, he shuffled across, and stood wet and dripping beside his companions.

"Come on," said Harry, shaking himself again, and addressing the others, who were still standing with long faces by the broken bridge: "let's run; we shall soon be home, and nobody will meet us in Park Lane."

"But where's the basket?" exclaimed Fred.

"Oh!" cried Harry, aghast.

"Why, it's gone," said Fred, "and the fish can't get out, though they are in the water."

Gone it was; there was not even a handle of the basket to be seen above the water, though they looked long and anxiously up and down the river, and everywhere that seemed impossible for it to have got to. But it was gone, and no doubt the poor eels were drinking in their natural element and twisting about in their little wicker prison; turning their companions, the decapitated eel and the dead trout, over and over, and up and down, in their efforts to escape.

At last the trio started off, but with anything but light hearts, for their appearance was far from being as neat as when they set off in the morning. Fred was all over flour, through kneeling in the mill and lolling up against the sacks; while his cousins looked as wet, muddy, and pitiable, as two unfortunate, half-drowned young monkeys could look. The butterflies flitted before them and danced up and down in the sunny air, displaying their gorgeous wings; the yellowhammer flew out from amongst the nettles, and betrayed the place where his sober-hued little mate was sitting upon her grassy nest; a stoat ran across the road with a bird in his mouth, and disappeared in the bank unchased; the corncrake sang his harsh song in the park, seemingly close beneath the pales; and two squirrels ran along the road right in front of them, and then sat down with their little bushy tails cocked up, watching the boys ever so long before they darted up the beech-tree bole, and hid behind the great branches. But it was of no use; there was no tempting the boys out of their solid sombre moodiness; and on they tramped, fishless and disconsolate, for their young spirits were not damped, but literally drenched; and then, too, they had lost their wicker idol, full of captives—captives which, like those of the ancient Britons, were to have been roasted; but now, alas! were in danger of being drowned; if, as old anglers tell us, fish can be drowned.

The day was brighter than ever, but for them it had lost its brightness; and sadly and slowly they crossed the stile, crept across the home-field, round to the stable-yard, and in by the back door; and, no one seeing them, hurried up to their bedrooms, so that Harry and Philip were able to make a decent appearance at dinner-time, without frightening Mr and Mrs Inglis by their half-drowned aspect.

It took a long time before it came to the surface, and a great amount of determination before Harry could speak out respecting the morning's mishap; for

he, though the younger, was always the chief speaker; but at last out it came with a rush, while Papa was helping the pudding, making him give such a start that he put the wedge-shaped piece of rhubarb pudding right upon the snowy white tablecloth instead of Fred's plate.

"I say, Papa, Philip and I tumbled into Whaley Dyke, coming home from the mill to-day; and it was so full that Phil would have been drowned, for he was too much afraid to swim, only Fred pulled him out."

And then, as the ice was broken, Harry told the whole tale, not omitting the loss of the basket; and, though both Papa and Mamma looked serious as they thought of the danger their boys had run, yet, as Harry had prophesied, Papa was not very cross about it; and, after a little serious admonition, shook hands with them all round, and said how proud he was to think he could always trust his boys to tell the truth, for now he could always have confidence in their word, and feel that he could depend upon them in everything.

"But, papa," said Harry at last, breaking out into a regular whimper, "they were *such* eels!"

"And *such* a trout!" said Philip. "And *such* a jack!" said Fred. "And they've all gone back to the river again," said Harry; "and I did want the jack for the little pond, and old Bob will be sure to come up to-night to see if you will give him something for the eels, and we didn't get them."

"Never mind, boys," said Mr Inglis; "I dare say we can make it all right with Bob, the miller; and no doubt there are as fine eels in the river as ever came out of it."

As for Mrs Inglis, she seemed to take a more loving fancy to Fred than she had before accorded to her sister's child; for had he not saved her boy's life?

Sure enough, Bob came down to the house that very evening, grinning and smirking, and looking as pleasant as if he felt sure that he was going to have some of the squire's home-brewed ale, and half-a-crown as well. But Bob grinned a little more than he would have done in general upon such an occasion; and when he caught sight of the boys he kept grinning more than ever, and beckoning them in his uncouth way to come to him; but Harry and Philip did not feel much disposed to go to Bob, for there was all the dissatisfaction of the loss of the fish, and they did not like Bob being paid for what they did not profit by. But at last Bob's demonstrations were so violent that the three boys went into the kitchen together, and then and there the dusty old rascal drew from behind him, all the while grinning and showing his teeth more than ever, the very basket they had lost, tied-up as though it had never been opened, and with all the fish inside.

Fred looked upon Bob as though he was a mighty conjurer.

"Why, they came down the stream to the mill," said Harry, beaming with his discovery. "So they did, Master Harry; you're right."

"And you found them up against the grating?"

"So I did, Master Harry; I did find 'em there."

"And then you brought them here?"

"So I did, Master Harry; you're right, I did."

"Oh! hooray!" shouted Harry. "Hooray!" shouted Phil.

"Hurray!" said Fred, hardly knowing why, but cheering because the others did. And then out came the Squire, and out came Mrs Inglis, and out came the eels, and out came the praises, and out came Bob's half-crown; and the next day when

those fish were cooked, the Squire declared that this was the best trout he had ever tasted; and as to the eels, why they were the richest, nicest, and best eels that were ever eaten, and no one enjoyed them better than the boys who had had so much difficulty in gaining them for a prize.

Chapter 5

Buying a new Water-Bottle.

AND NOW one morning, as soon as it was daylight, Harry jumped out of bed and ran to his brother's, and with one whisk dragged everything off—sheet, blankets, counterpane, and almost Philip, and then the young ruffian rushed into Fred's room, served him in the same way, and narrowly escaped a crack on the head from his cousin's boot, which was sent flying after him as he ran, but hit the wall instead, and then fell toe foremost into the big wash hand jug, that seemed as if it stood there on purpose to catch it.

"Jump up, boys; why it's ever so late, I believe," said Harry. "I'll go and see what time it is. Shrimping day!"

Directly after Harry reappeared in Fred's room, and found Philip there.

"I say, the clock's stopped in the night; it wants a quarter to four by that old stupid thing on the staircase. I'll go down to the dining-room and see there; I know it's half-past seven, and everybody is lying in bed because Papa said we should all start in good time for the sands. Don't I wish I was behind old Sam! Shouldn't I like to put a wasp in his bed!"

He then slipped quietly down to the dining-room. All was still; the blinds drawn down, but the room was light enough for him to see the hands upon the face of the little timepiece over the fireplace.

"Ten minutes to four," said the clock.

"All the clocks are wrong," said Harry, pettishly. "It must be late. I know it is. I'll go in the kitchen."

So off he went, pat, pat, with his bare feet over the oilcloth, and then upon the sandy stones in the kitchen. Plenty of light there, and the old Dutch clock plainly to be seen, only the pendulum stood still, and the weights had run down; for cook had forgotten to draw them up on the previous night. "Quarter to twelve," said the clock.

"Oh! come, that won't do," said Harry. "I know it's late. Don't I wish I had a watch of my own; I should know what the real time was then."

Up he went to Fred's room with the same tale upon his lips respecting the time, but as unbelieving as ever.

"Why, it is only four o'clock," said Philip, looking out of the window; "and there's the sun just rising. Well, you are a chap, Hal, to wake one up at this time of the morning and say it's late. I shall go to bed again."

"So shall I," said Fred.

“No, you won’t,” said Harry; dragging the clothes together and making a bundle, with which he ran off into his own room with both the others in full chase. And then began a regular scrimmage, French and English fashion, and Harry, having two enemies, was pulled down sprawling over a rushbottom chair, and then nearly kicked over the washstand, making such a clatter that the Squire knocked angrily at the wall; when off the noisy ones ran back into Fred’s room, Harry this time being the pursuer, armed with his bolster, “Bang, crash—crash, bang—whiz—wuz—rush.” Fred went backwards upon his bed, hors de combat, from a well-directed blow from Harry’s bolster; and then at it went Harry and Phil—the latter being armed with a pillow, down whose front a ghastly slit soon showed itself; but Philip fought well, and Harry was getting worsted and driven into the corner amongst the boots, where the footing was rather bad for bare feet “Flop!” Harry caught it then and staggered back. “Flop” again, for Philip was surpassing himself, and Harry having received the last blow full upon the top of his head went down upon one knee; but he rallied again, ducked to avoid the next blow, and diving under Philip’s arm came up behind, and “Whooz!” went the bolster bang upon Phil’s back, and “Crash!” went Philip forward, ram fashion, with his head into the wardrobe door.

At it again: “whop—whop—flip—flop—bang,” went pillow and bolster, while Fred, sitting tailor fashion upon his bed, was rolling with laughter. At last Philip began to shew signs of being beaten, and Harry whirled his bolster round his head in order to administer the coup de grâce, when “crash!”—the water-bottle and tumbler were swept off the dressing-table, splintering to pieces on the floor, and covering the carpet with feet-piercing fragments and puddles of cold water.

“Oh! shan’t we catch it!” said both combatants, ceasing the war, like two enemies who had just awakened to the fact that they had been doing a vast amount of mischief to somebody else’s property.

“Oh! I say, whatever shall we do?” said Philip in dismay.

“Pick up the pieces,” said Harry, laconically.

The three boys set to work, picked up the pieces, and sponged up the water; but there was a great, rugged, black-looking patch, like a North American continent, with plenty of islands all round it, in the midst of the carpet; but then, too, there were the fragments of broken bottle and glass.

“Oh! I say, what shall we do?” exclaimed Philip again, when all was made as decent as circumstances would permit.

There was a minute’s silence which no one seemed inclined to break; but at last Harry said, moodily, “Why, we must go and tell Mamma; she won’t be so very, very cross.”

“She will, though; for she said we were not to bolster, because it spoiled the pillow-cases so, and—”

Here Philip caught sight of the pillow lying upon Fred’s bed, the cover being nearly torn off. Upon seeing this ghastly object Philip looked more grim than ever, and he left his sentence unfinished.

“Let’s buy another bottle,” said Fred; “I’ll pay.”

This was a new idea.

“Capital,” said Harry. “I’ve got a shilling Papa gave me yesterday, and I’ll pay half.”

“So will I,” said Philip, brightening up.

But, as the bottle could not be bought by the lads all paying half, it was decided that they should all bear a share in the proposed expense, and go and buy the new water-holder before breakfast.

“Hooray!” said Harry, “jump into your clothes, boys, and we’ll run down to the village and be back before breakfast’s ready.”

In another quarter of an hour, the lads passed through the gate, and stood in the lane leading to the village. Such a bright fine morning, the sun gilding all the trees, and the birds singing away more merrily than ever. The boys had looked at the clock as they descended the staircase, and it was only five; so, as they had plenty of time upon their hands to reach the village, they sauntered slowly along, having only two miles to go.

“I say,” said Harry, “let’s cross the fields and go round by the back lane; we shall then go over the shallows, and Fred has never seen the stepping-stones.”

“How much farther is it?” said Fred.

“Only about a mile,” was the reply.

Off they went, over the stile, and then across the dewy grass, over more fields, glittering in the morning sunlight, and then down into the back lane.

“Tuck up your trousers, boys,” said Harry, setting the example; and then when that preliminary was arranged, splish, splash, they went along the wet path.

A splendid lane that was for a walk, always under water, with quite a stream flowing in parts, and shaded on either side by high hedges and banks. It was always considered impassable, except in very dry weather and in carts. But mischievous boys rather liked the back lane; there was some fun in going along it, for it was nearly always half-way up the boots, and then the water splashed so capitally when you ran down it. Besides which, there were rats there, and stray sticklebacks: and the nicest, smoothest, and roundest pebbles for throwing to be got anywhere; besides, boots and feet soon get dry again in the summer-time; and, after all, a good bit of fun is worth all the wet boots in the world—at least, boys of twelve and thirteen think so.

“Is it all wet, like this?” said Fred, rather taken aback at the appearance of the place.

“Rat! rat! rat!” roared Harry, a cry taken up by Philip; and away they splashed, running upon their toes in chase of the long-tailed burrower. But Rat never went very far from his residence in the day-time; and, consequently, he showed the hunters only just the tip of his tail for a moment, as he dived into his hole, and was gone. A little further on the lane became dry again, and continued so, with the exception of a little rivulet at the side, where the water was dimpling and glittering over the stones, washed clean and smooth, and amongst which the boys soon found plenty of those curious little fish, the stone loaches, for the most part lying snugly beneath some great pebble, which had to be turned over to effect their capture.

At last they reached the river and the stepping-stones. Here the stream had widened out and was very shallow, great rough masses of pudding stone being laid on the bed to let wayfarers pass over dry-shod. This was, however, a luxury looked upon with great contempt by Harry, who merely drew his trousers into a roll above his knees, and walked straight in all amongst the water-cresses and forget-me-

nots which peeped up here and there. Of course, such an example must needs be followed upon the instant, and soon there were three young storks wading about in the shallows.

"Look! look!" said Fred, all at once; "what's, that?"

They might well look, for with his scales glittering in the morning sun, and making the water surge as he endeavoured to reach a portion of the river more suitable for his bulk, a large pike came down the stream on his side. He was a monster, and seemed nearly a yard long, and so big that the boys could do nothing but stare at him at first; but Harry was not to be put out of countenance by the biggest pike in England, so at him he rushed.

"Come on," he shouted, "turn him back. If he gets past the stones, the water is deeper, and we shall lose him."

Philip and Fred closed in, but never put forth a hand to touch the pike. Not so Harry, for he boldly made a dash at it, and caught hold of the slippery monster, who gave a flash with his tail, and was off yards away, with Harry in full pursuit; and this time, the water being shallower, he managed to give a good kick at the fresh-water shark, but only one, for the fish gave another shoot, and was gone.

"There's a brute!" said Harry. "He might just as well have been caught. Wasn't he a thumper?"

"Let's get some water-cresses and take home," said Phil.

"Where are there any?" said Fred, who had never seen them growing before.

"Why, here, all about; here's lots and lots."

So the lads set to, and picked a goodly bunch a piece, Philip remembering, too, a little bouquet of forget-me-nots for his mother; and then, landing on the opposite side, they strolled up the river to see if they could see Harry's friend, the pike, but, no! he was invisible; and not to be wondered at, after the manner in which he had been treated. Still, though there was no pike, there was plenty else to be seen, for the fish were rising all over the river; and out in the bright calm places great chub were lazily basking in the warm sun. On every shallow, shoals of roach and dace appeared, and rushed out in silvery squadrons over the pebbly bottom; while the minnows and gudgeon seemed as though they had been drilled, so regularly and closely they kept together as they darted out into the middle of the river.

Plenty to be seen? Ay, plenty; pretty little reed-warblers twittering and chattering in amongst the strands which formed their waving home; and every now and then the little bearded tits made their appearance, but only to dart out of sight again in a moment. High over head sang the lark, "trill—trill—trill;" and the soft sweetness of the morning seemed to pervade everything. Now and then red and orange billed moor-hens would lead their dusky little broods from amongst the reeds, and after a short swim, lead them in again when they saw that they were watched. Plenty to see? Ay! so much, that the water, the sky, and the green banks took away every thought of the water-bottle and the village, and even of breakfast, till all of a sudden Harry burst out—

"Oh, I'm so jolly hungry! let's turn back."

"I wonder what time it is?" said Philip.

"Seven," said Harry, "I know. Let's get down to the village and get the bottle at old Perkins's, and then it will be time to go home to breakfast. Oh! what a jolly morning!"

They were soon abreast of the stones again where the path led down to the village, and just then the distant church clock struck.

"Told you so," said Harry, counting. "One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—*eight!*"

The boys stared at one another quite aghast, and then, taking their cue from Harry, started off full speed towards home, forgetting everything but the idea of getting back in time for breakfast.

When they entered the breakfast-room, nearly breathless, but with sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks, both Mr and Mrs Inglis looked rather serious; but the boys seemed so bright and happy that they had not the heart to be cross with them, though the second cup of coffee was being poured out, and the Squire loved punctuality; and though Mrs Inglis had been into the boys' bedrooms and seen the mischief they had done.

"Come, boys; come, boys," said Mr Inglis, cheerily; "this won't do; you won't last till night. Why, we're going down to get enough specimens to start the salt-water aquarium; and Jem Baines, from the station, brought the glass last night. It came down from London by the goods train. There it is," he continued, pointing to an enormous inverted bell-glass standing upon a block of ebony fitted for its reception.

But the boys were too hungry to do more than glance at the crystal bell, though Harry, with his mouth full, did say something that sounded very much like "booty," though he evidently meant it for beauty. However, it was excusable, as any of my young readers will say if they consider that Harry had been up four hours, and out in the fresh air of the bright summer morning.

Chapter 6

Down by the Sea.

"NOW, BOYS," said the Squire, when the breakfast was over, "time flies. Harry, you tell Sam to bring the dog-cart round. Philip and Fred, you help me to get the jars and bottles into the hall."

This was soon done, and, the cart coming round, it was packed with the different odds and ends that naturalists take with them when going to the sea-side; and also with those agreeable refreshments taken by all people, whether naturalists or not, when they anticipate being by the rocks and shingle for a few hours in the fresh sea-breeze. The boys then eagerly took their places, the horse leaped to the light shake of the reins given by the Squire, Sam left its head, Mamma waved her handkerchief from the porch, the gate was passed, and away they went bowling over the hard road, and past, green trees, hedges, and fields, with the sweet smell of new-turned hay borne on the morning breeze, while the sky above seemed clearer and brighter than ever.

"Now, boys, which way shall we go; down by the marsh, or along the upland at once to the rocks?"

“Oh, through the marsh, Papa!” said Harry; “and then you can drive along the sands to the rocks. It is so nice and quiet riding along the sands.”

“Yes,” said his father; “but how about old Tom, here? He won’t like dragging all you great fellows through the heavy sand; will you, Tom?”

Old Tom on hearing his master’s cheery voice gave his head a toss, as much as to say, “I should think not,” and then trotted along faster than ever, making the wheels spin round, and the dust fly in a cloud behind them.

And now they began to leave the woods behind: the hedges began to get scarcer and shorter, and at last they were out in the marsh—a marsh no longer, but a large and far spreading plain, divided by broad drains and ditches, and dotted over with enormous cattle grazing in the rich fat grass; while here and there the land seemed waving in the gentle breeze as it lightly passed over the bending crops of wheat, oats, rye, and barley. Here and there were farmhouses scattered at wide interval while in the distance stood a church with a few houses clustered round it, and towards this point Fred could now see that the road tended. Soon they could see the high bank that guarded the marsh from the ravages of the sea in its angry moments; and away to the right the beetling cliffs, with the downs running up to the summits, and ending in a sheer precipice three or four hundred feet deep, at whose foot it was said a man-of-war had once been wrecked, and all souls drowned. Down beneath the cliff, too, were the rocks of every fantastic shape or form, now with the water just gently lapping their weed-hung sides, but in stormy weather covering them with foam as it alternately showed their grim and jagged shapes, or hid them from view. Woe, then, to the unfortunate vessel that came amongst them, for the pitiless waves would lift it up bodily, and then dash it down upon the cruel stones, shivering it to pieces, and sending the splintered fragments to beat against the tall cliffs or strew the shore! But the sea was now placid and beautiful, with the sun making his beams glance off the heaving waves in far spreading rays, while the tiny retiring wavelets left their marks upon the sand in little ripple-marks, covered all over with the casts thrown-up by the sea-worms.

Old Tom had no heavy drag over the sands, for the boys were down in an instant, racing over the flat surface, while Mr Inglis drove gently on towards the rocks, where he drew up the car, took out Tom, secured him to the wheel, and left him at last with his nose-bag on, under the shadow of the rocks, nibbling his corn, and whisking the flies away with his long tail. His master then took a bottle or two, and a couple of hand-nets and a hammer, and walked down towards the water’s edge. Soon the boys joined him, loaded already; for there were such heaps of treasures—long razor shells, whelk and cockle shells, limpets, mussels, periwinkles, star-fish in the pools, seaweed of all shapes and colours, shrimps; while all over the sand where they stood, busy sea-lice were hopping about in myriads.

Mr Inglis sent the boys for another glass jar or two, and an iron bar that lay at the bottom of the cart; and then down they went towards low-water mark, and searched amid the rocky pools till the Squire found one to his satisfaction, when he stopped.

“Now, Fred,” he said, “you shall see what wondrous things there are in a little pool, by the sea-side.”

And now, peering down into the clear, still water, they looked into a little submarine forest of weeds—nay, of beautiful branching miniature trees; while on the rocks were what seemed to Fred like flowers of the most beautiful colours.

"Now, Fred," said Mr Inglis, "fill your jar with water, and pick that fine fellow off the rock."

"It won't bite, will it?" said Fred, nervously, for he felt somehow that it was not what it seemed.

"Bite? no!" laughed his cousins; "look here," and Harry turned up his sleeve and touched the beautifully tinted petals.

In a moment they were gone, and in their place a dull-looking thing, like a piece of soaking wet leather. At the solicitations of his cousins, however, and following their example, Fred soon had several dull, dumpy-looking discs in his jar. But now their attention was called to Mr Inglis, who had found a specimen of the brittle star-fish, which soon showed its right to the name by throwing off a couple of ray-like arms. Next there were pinky-looking sea-slugs to gaze upon; and at last, under a stone which Mr Inglis turned over with the iron bar, such a myriad of objects for wonder and admiration, that all eyes were directed to the different specimens, while every ear was open to drink in the descriptions given by Mr Inglis. One of the curiosities was a long, thin black ribbon, coiled and twisted about in all sorts of awkward bends and curves; and this Mr Inglis told them was a curious worm that lay with one end—the tail—firmly anchored to a stone, while with the head it seized the first thing that touched it as it swam by. Then would begin a struggle, the trapped one darting off, and dragging to get away; while the worm, tough, thin, and pliant as a fishing-line, let it play about till tired out, when the thin, black-looking monster would quietly swallow his prey, boa-constrictor fashion, till nothing was visible of it but a large knob in the worm's thin body. Then there were polypes; hermit-crabs with their tails in cast-off shells; tiny shell-fish tightly clinging to the stones; boring shells, weeds, and tangles, swarming with innumerable tiny living forms; and so at last bottles and jars were as well filled as was possible with treasures enough to afford them amusement for the next month.

They were all so busy that they did not notice the return of the tide; but there is was, creeping slowly, surely, and silently in; and all at once in came a fresh supply of water to the little pool, and showed our visitors how soon it would be covered by the coming waters. And so they had to retreat before the tide, like King Canute is said to have done, years ago. They took all their treasures to the car; and then set to work to unpack the basket which Mamma had prepared for the trip. And, oh, how they enjoyed that meal, sitting as they were upon the sands, with the cloth spread between them! There never was such delicious cold chicken before, nor yet such ham, such currant and raspberry and cherry tart, such a bottle of cream, that wouldn't come out, it was so thick, but had to be poked forth with a fork. Everything was delicious, down to the lemonade in the big bottle, although it had grown rather warm through standing in the sun. Altogether it was a glorious repast, eaten as it was on that delightful day, the dimpling sea spreading out before them as far as the eye could reach, with here and there a white sail like a speck upon the vast expanse.

At last the lunch or dinner was ended, and then there was plenty more to do and see. There was the old man sitting in his donkey-cart, very stupidly as Fred thought, driving it along in the shallow water; but when they came nearer they could see there were a couple of ropes dragging behind; and just as they came up, out drove the old man very slowly, and the two ropes at the tail of the cart dragged forth a long shrimping-net, in which, for the first time, Fred saw hundreds upon hundreds of the curious-looking crustaceans crawling about, black and ugly, and in company with numbers of little silvery fish, which the old man threw out, whereupon they shuffled their little bodies down out of sight in the wet sand. Fred was about to rake them out again, but a word of warning restrained him, for they were the little sticklebacks of the sea, only their prickles made wounds of a poisonous nature that were a long time getting well.

Mr Inglis bought a basketful of the shrimps, although Fred said they were black ones and not good; but he changed his mind when they came up for tea, hot and red, and steaming from cook's saucepan.

Then the old man drove in again to his shrimping, and our party stopped to examine the jelly-fish, like glass paper-weights, which were left upon the sand, while Mr Inglis pointed out two or three which had been left by the morning tide, and were now dried up to a thin, filmy skin. There was plenty to see. On the cliffs there was samphire in abundance, which they could easily gather, without hanging half-way down like Shakespeare's samphire-gatherer. They picked a good bunch for cook to pickle; and collected so many things of all sorts and kinds that Papa at last cried, "Hold, enough!" for poor Tom would never be able to get everything home. Pockets, baskets, handkerchiefs, even thing was full. There were perforated stones; shells of all kinds; sea-weeds; dry star-fish; pieces of jet; bright pebbles; smooth pearly pieces of oyster-shell; tiny pebbles bright and glistening; in short, such a collection of treasures that Mr Inglis looked at his watch and declared it was time to go, for they would have to travel slowly on account of the live specimens. One thing remained to do, and that was to fill the great stone bottle, brought on purpose, with water for the new aquarium.

"Gluggle, gluggle—blob, blob," went the big bottle as the air rushed out, displaced by the salt-water, till the great thing was full, securely corked, and deposited in the car. Tom's nose-bag was taken off, his bit replaced, the boys mounted, for they were too tired to walk along the sands, and they began their noiseless journey homewards, where they arrived just as the sun was beginning to sink behind the hills, and turning everything to burnished gold.

Chapter 7

Lost in the Woods.

"WHOO-OO-oo-oop!" sang out Philip Inglis.

"Hoop—hoop—hoop!" shouted Fred as loud as he could.

And then both stopped to listen, but not a sound could they hear anything like a reply. There was a regular deep humming from the gnats and flies; the twittering of a few distant birds; but with these exceptions all was solemn silence.

The boys had been out in the woods ever since three o'clock, seeking for eggs for the cabinet, and had been very successful; but now the sun was setting, and the last rays were turning the sky overhead into one glorious golden canopy; the forest shades were getting deeper, and as Fred said, he would not have cared only it was so dreadfully quiet, and Harry was lost; and what was worse than all was, they were lost themselves; and this is how it fell out:

Mr Inglis had been talking about the collection of eggs they had in the little museum, and said he would go with the boys to Beechy Wood, to see if they could get a few more specimens; for he particularly wanted two or three eggs rather difficult to obtain, such as the great spotted woodpecker's, hawfinch's, and coletit's.

"Oh, do let's go to-day, Papa," said Harry, clapping his hands. "That will be capital."

"Yes, yes, yes," said Philip.

"No; not to-day," said the Squire; "I have several business matters to attend to in the town, so you had better play cricket in the field, and perhaps we may start to-morrow."

Not the least disappointed of the trio was Fred, to whom the very name of wood sounded romantic; he almost expected to find such a cave as Ali Baba hit upon when out with his donkey, wood-cutting; or that the place they went to would be the identical forest where the redbreasts covered the unfortunate babes over with leaves when they laid down and died. But it was of no use to be disappointed; they must wait till another day, and, therefore, they went into the field to play cricket till dinner-time.

Cricket is a capital game: it looks well to see light, active figures chasing the ball when the batsman has thrown all his power into the leg hit, and sent the ball bounding and skimming far away beyond the farther fielder; then backwards and forwards run the men at the wickets, while the onlookers cheer and shout at the bowler's prowess, as he stops the thrown-up ball, and hurls it at the wicket-keeper, who, with apparently one motion for catching and knocking off the bailes, puts the hard hitter out.

Ah, it's a noble game, is cricket! it puts muscle on young bones, sharpness in young eyes, tone in constitution, and a readiness to meet difficulties and to parry them. Health, that rosy-cheeked goddess, seems to have chosen the game for her own, and to love to place the reflection of her own cheeks upon those of the players, and to make them ruddy brown as well. But, somehow or other, cricket grows to be rather dull and tedious when the players are idle and will not work. Everything, if it is worth doing at all, is worth doing well: the heart must be in it, and it must be done, as the sailors say, "with a will." When you go to play cricket, it must not happen that you have your mind out in Beechy Wood seeking for woodpeckers' nests; or else it will be something the same with you as it was with our lads on that bright July day, when things would keep going wrong. Harry would bowl too swiftly, and send the ball right past the wicket ever so far, for Philip to fetch back; and then, again, Philip would hit so savagely, and make Fred

run so far after the rolling ball, which in its turn was obstinate, and would keep creeping amongst the long grass, and getting lost; or amongst the stinging-nettles, where Fred, who did not know their qualities, was stung, and had to be rubbed with dock leaves, when they could find any, which, either from idleness or their unrule-like absence, was not for some time. Then Harry sent the bailes flying with a vicious ball as soon as Fred went in for his innings, and so they were lost, and had to be found; and soon after, while Harry was in, Fred threw the ball up so sharply, that Phil, in catching, missed it, and received a blow in the stomach that made him lie down and brought the tears into his eyes, as much from vexation as pain. Then the sun would shine so hotly, and the flies tease, and the nasty cows had been all over the place where they generally played; so at last the game of cricket came to a stand-still till dinner-time; when, having left their bats and stumps in the field, they went in to the mid-day meal.

After dinner, they returned to the cricket-ground, but matters were worse than ever: the flies seemed to be savage to think that the boys had been having a hearty meal while they had been fasting, so they set to work to see if they could not take it out of them, and began by attacking Fred, then Harry, then Philip; till at last, what with the heat, the idle feeling, and the teasing of the flies, the boys gave up playing in despair, and stood lounging under the great cedar, cross, tired, and ill-tempered.

"I should like to go to bed," said Fred.

"There's an idle-back," said Harry; "I shouldn't I should like to take my clothes off, and lie down under a fountain, and let all the nice cool water trickle and splash all over me. Poof! ain't it hot?"

"I know what I should like to do," said Philip; "I should like to sit right up there on the top of the cedar, and rock—rock, rock—rock, backwards and forwards—looking up at the blue sky, and thinking I was a soft, downy bird."

"Ho! ho! ho!" said Harry. "He'd look like an old cock jackdaw when he's moulting. Ha! ha! ha! what an old stupid!"

"I don't care," said Philip; "I know it would be nice; wouldn't it, Fred?"

"Well, but you couldn't sit there; the boughs would break, and you'd come down," said Fred. "But what makes all that thick bunch of hay and rags up there? Why, it's a nest, isn't it?"

"So it is," said Harry; "why, I never saw that before. Let's get up and get it. There's sure to be eggs."

"I shan't," said Phil; "it's too hot."

"What a lazy old chap you are, Phil," said his brother. "It's a tree-sparrow's nest, and we haven't got a single egg. I mean to go."

Saying which Master Harry stripped off his blouse, threw down his cap, and commenced operations.

"Don't go, you'll fall," said Fred; "it's ever so high up, and the boughs won't bear you."

"Pooh!" said Harry, "I can do it;" and running along under the great branches that stretched away, drooping towards the ground, he gave a spring, and caught a bough, turned up his heels, and so made his way, hanging head downwards, to the trunk after the same fashion as he did on the day of the fishing excursion. On reaching the trunk, he scaled up from bough to bough, almost as actively as a

monkey, till at last he reached the branch which bore the nest, where he stooped puzzled, for Mrs and Mr Passer must have had an eye to safety when they constructed their nest; for unless Master Harry had possessed the activity and lightness of body of the old cock jackdaw he was so lately talking about, there was no chance of his getting any of the tree-sparrow's eggs for his collection.

"Well, why don't you throw the nest down?" said Philip, jeeringly.

"'Cos I can't," said Harry. "Why don't you come and sit up here, and look at the blue sky, and then perhaps you could? I'm not going on a thin branch that wouldn't bear a cat."

Whereupon down came Master Harry, all over green, and with the cedar spines sticking through his shirt, in his hair, and down his back, and making him shift and shuffle about in a most uncomfortable manner.

"I say," said Harry, "let's go off to the wood."

"Papa wouldn't like it," said Philip; "and besides, we are going to-morrow."

"Oh! ah! and then perhaps it will rain. Do let's go; we could get the eggs, and Papa would be so pleased."

"I don't think he would," said Fred. "My Papa would not if I went when he told me not."

"But he didn't tell us not," said Harry; "and I know he would like the eggs. I'll go."

"That's right," said Philip, "but I'll go and tell Mamma we are going."

"No, don't," said Harry; "let's tell her when we come back, because she might say you had better not go."

"I shan't go," said Fred, stoutly.

"There's a sneak," said Harry. "Why, we could show you all sorts of things. There's the fox's cave; and the waterfall; and the old hollow tree that holds ten people; and the magpies' nests; and owls, and wood-pigeons, and turtle-doves."

"And snakes," said Philip.

"Yes," said Harry; "and snakes and adders, and the dark tarn where the great eels are. But never mind, you can stop; can't he, Phil? we don't want him. We'll take Dick, and get some rats as we go along. I say, Fred, you can stay in Dick's kennel, and we'll put the collar round your neck."

Now Fred wanted to do what was right, and would not blind himself into the belief that "Papa would be so pleased with the eggs;" for he knew his uncle would not like them to go off in the way proposed; but he was not prepared to withstand the temptations held out to him, for they were enough to turn the head of any town lad. To go to a wood was almost enough, but one with such wonders in was too much—nests and birds of such rarity. Fox cavern, waterfall, and a dark tarn, besides catching rats with the dog; he could not stand all that. And then when the sarcastic remarks of his cousin were put into the scale he was completely done for, and, turning quite reckless of the consequences, he let the scale containing duty fly up into the air, and jumped into the other with his cousins, and away they ran to loosen Dick. But this was easier said than done, for Dick could see at a glance that there was mischief afoot, and nearly ran mad with delight: he barked, he leaped, he tore at his chain, he tugged so that Harry could not unbuckle his collar; and when at last it was dragged over his head, turning his ears inside out, and making his rough hair stand up in a bigger Brutus than ever, and nearly making

him blind, he raced round the yard with his mouth wide open; dashed at the old raven, and knocked him over before he could hop upon the wall, where he got at last, and shook the dust off his feathers with an angry "jark;" while Dick, withy staring eyes and his tongue hanging out, ran right between Philip's legs, made a feint at Fred, and then leaped right on Harry, who caught hold of his short stumpy tail as he went down and dragged him towards the gate.

"Whoop," and away; over the field right to the far corner, where the cattle drank from the little horse-pond, which was black with podnoddles, wagging and waving their little tails in their hurry to get into deep water. "Whoop," and away along the lane; all idleness and fatigue forgotten, and every nerve strained to reach the wished-for spot, which was only about two miles from the field where the lads played at cricket.

"Last man there to have two kicks," said Harry, just as he was well in front, and starting off at full speed, but passed in a moment by Dick, who raced away, making believe to discover a treasure every two minutes; and sniffing and barking at every rat or rabbit hole they passed. Off and away—Harry in front with Dick, Philip next, and Fred panting in the rear, hot and out of breath with his run, and asking his companions to stop.

"Whup! whup! whup! yaff! yaff!" said Dick, as they came up to a field containing a flock of sheep, heavy with their long wool; and over the hedge he went headlong amongst them, making the poor timid, stupid creatures run as fast as their legs would carry them, with their heavy fleeces touzling and shaking about till each sheep looked like a magnified thrum mop being shaken to get rid of the water. A fine game did Dick have of it, for as soon as ever he stopped and gave a farewell bark—as much as to say, "There, I've done"—and began to retrace his steps, the sheep would come to a stand-still, stare after him as though he were some unknown monster, never before seen or heard of, and then begin to follow him up, slowly at first, but afterwards at a canter. Now, of course Dick couldn't stand this running away, and all the sheep apparently in chase of him; so he was obliged to turn round and keep making charges at the flock; and, consequently, poor Dick, in thus being so particular about his honour, would never have got out of the field, for every time he chased the sheep away they followed him up again; and it was all the fault of one great, black-faced, chuckle-headed wether, who was so stupid that he couldn't keep quiet, and of course all the sheep kept following him, for he had a tinkling copper bell attached to his neck, which seemed to be an especial abhorrence to Dick, from the way he barked at it. But at last the dog heard a summons that he could not disobey, namely, a long whistle from his young masters; so making one last furious charge at the old bell wether, and actually scattering the forces as he got hold of him by the wool. Dick rushed after his masters, and caught them at last with a lot of wool in his mouth, which was entangled in his teeth, and made him cough and sputter dreadfully.

At last they reached the edge of the wood, into which Dick dashed with a leap and a bound, running his nose down amongst the dead leaves, and smelling an enemy in every bush, and at last giving chase to a squirrel which ran across the open to a great beech-tree, up which it scampered until it reached the forked boughs, where it sat with its tail curled up, looking tormentingly down upon his pursuer Dick, who rushed headlong at the tree, scrambled up a couple of feet, and

then came down flop upon his back, without the squirrel of course; but he made up for it by running round and round the trunk, barking, baying, and snapping in impotent rage, while little nut-nibbler gave a sort of "skirr," and then ran up the tree, leaped to the next, and the next, and disappeared in his hole far up the trunk of a great elm. Harry now took the lead down the narrow path that led into the wood, parting the tangled branches every now and then to get through, and all the time looking carefully round for nests. They very soon heard the harsh cry of the jay, who was letting all the inhabitants of the woodlands know that enemies were at hand, and away flew the birds. The blackbird was the first to take the alarm from the jay, and away he flew, crying, "Kink, kink, kink," as he started from his nest in a great ivy tod on an old pollard-tree. The lads soon found the nest, and peeped in, but instead of eggs there were four wretched-looking little objects, all eyes and beak, with long, scraggy necks, wide throats, and naked bodies with little downy tufts upon them. All three had a peep, while Dick snapped his teeth together as though to say he would like to make a meal of one or all of them; but the callow brood was left unmolested for their yellow-billed parents to take care of, while Harry led the way to the fox's cave. This, however, proved rather a disappointment to Fred, who had been picturing to himself a huge stalactite cavern, which they would require torches to explore, while the cave in question proved to be only a hole in the side of a gravelly ravine, big enough to creep in, certainly, but anything but majestic in appearance; while the probabilities were that a fox had never been in it since it was a hole. However, it was called the fox's cave, and that was enough.

The waterfall was certainly better worthy of attention, for a tiny stream trickled over a huge mossy rock, and fell with a musical plash into a little rocky basin full of clear water; and all around it in the damp soil grew mosses and ferns of luxuriant size. It was just such a spot as the old poets used to write about—cool, and shaded from the heat and glare of the sun; but, instead of there being wood-nymphs and satyrs in the little dell, there was nothing but the three young visitors, and plenty of toads and frogs which crawled and hopped away as fast as ever they could.

"Oh, what a pretty place!" said Fred; "do let's stop here. Look, look," he exclaimed, "what's that?" as, like a streak of blue light, a bird with rapid flight came down the dell, perched upon a bare twig just long enough for the boys to see his bright colours, and then, seeing himself watched, darted away again.

"That's a kingfisher," said Philip. "He's got a nest here, somewhere, I know. Let's look, for we must have some of the eggs, if we can. Perhaps the hen-bird is sitting somewhere close by."

The boys then set to work searching the bushes of the little rivulet that flowed from the basin, and no doubt their search would have been in vain, but for the timid hen-bird, who flew out from the hole where, sure enough, she was sitting, and betrayed the place in which her nest had been made.

It was a hole in the overhanging bank, and Harry had little difficulty in thrusting his hand in and drawing out three eggs, which he carefully deposited in his pocket.

They then followed the course of the rivulet for about a quarter of a mile to where it emptied itself into the tarn or little lake of which Harry had spoken. It was

indeed a dark tarn, with water looking almost black from its depth, which was said to be enormous, and here some gigantic eels were supposed to dwell, though nobody had ever caught, nobody had ever seen, and nobody ever heard of any being either seen or caught; but still eels of a mighty size were said to be in the tarn, and the reason for their not being caught was supposed to be the depth. As they came up to the lake, Dick ran on first and dashed into the reeds at the side, splashing and paddling about, and here and there taking to swimming. Just as he entered one great tuft of green reeds, rushes, and withes, there was an extra amount of splashing, and away flew, or rather ran along the surface of the water, a moorhen, with her thin attenuated toes just paddling the surface.

"Hooray," said Harry, calling Dick off, "here's a nest; moorhen's eggs, boys, moorhen's eggs!" and off he started to reach the nest; but here Master Harry was as badly off as when in the cedar-tree at home, for the moorhen had evidently intended to keep human visitors away, and Harry found that the coveted eggs, if any, were certainly not upon terra firma. Every step the lad took showed more plainly how treacherous was the surface round the tarn; for it was entirely composed of bog-moss—that pretty moss that turns of a creamy white, tinged with pink or salmon colour, when dried—and soon Master Harry could only progress by stepping daintily upon the little bunches of heath that grew amidst it, or upon the occasional tufts of last year's dead reeds and rushes. But, light as the boy was, he soon found this mode of progression would not do, for, making a bound on to what looked a particularly dry spot, in he went up to his knees in the soft bog, and it was only with great difficulty that he scrambled out again to where his brother and Fred stood laughing and cheering him.

"I don't care," said Harry, shaking himself like a dog; "I don't mind being wet, and, now I am wet, I mean to have the eggs."

"No, don't," said Fred, "you'll sink in."

"No, I shan't," said Harry; "I mean to make a corduroy-road, like they do over the swamps in America, that we read about."

"Ah, that will be capital," said Philip; "come on."

And so the lads set to work, and in amongst the trees close by they soon found a large dead branch, and laid it down across the first soft place, and they very soon would have had a firm pathway to the moorhen's nest, but for the simple reason that they were not provided with woodcutter's axes, ropes, etc; the consequence was, that they could find no more wood fit for the purpose, and Harry's corduroy-road was composed only of one cord.

"Oh," said Philip, "don't I wish we had a lot of the faggots out of the stack-yard."

"Let's fetch some," said Fred, which would have been a capital plan, only the faggots would have been rather awkward things to carry through the thick underwood; and, besides, they could only have carried one each, and home was now about four miles off, while they would have wanted at least twenty.

"What a jolly bother!" said Philip. "Why don't you go round the other side, Harry, and swim?"

"You go," said Harry: "I'd go, if it wasn't for the eels, and the water being so deep; I wouldn't mind, if it was only eight or nine feet, but they say it's hundreds of feet to the bottom."

But Philip did not feel disposed to go, and Fred could not swim, so, to their great disappointment, they were obliged to leave the moorhen's nest,—with at least a dozen eggs in, so Harry said; but, as he had been very little nearer to the receptacle than his brother and cousin, this statement was rather of a doubtful nature; still, as the others had not been so near, they did not feel themselves justified in contradicting, neither did they wish to, so the party reluctantly left the much-coveted treasure, the two wet members of the party—namely, Dick and Harry—leading the way further into the wood.

And now there were so many objects to take attention, that the professed purpose of the trip was quite forgotten, till Harry by chance spied a woodpecker just entering a hole in a hollow tree, and then called his companions' attention to the fact. To scale the tree was the work of a very few minutes, and, to Harry's intense delight, he found the hole sufficiently large to admit his hand and arm, and this time he was successful, for he drew forth with great care, one at a time, three woodpecker's eggs, which he placed its his cap, and then descended.

So far the trip had been most successful, for they had obtained the eggs generally reckoned as scarce in most parts of the country, from the secluded habits of the birds; and now the lads turned their attention to find the nest of a turtle-dove. The part of the wood they were in was very thick and full of underwood, a large proportion of which consisted of hazel stubs so dense that, almost before they were aware of it, Fred and Philip were separated from Harry and Dick; and when they did miss them, and called out, a faint and distant "Halloo!" was the response.

"Never mind," said Philip, "I'm tired. Let's sit down here and let him come to us."

Saying which he took his seat upon the mossy trunk of an old fallen tree, an example which Fred was not long in following; and there they waited, enjoying the delicious sensation of rest felt in a shady spot after a long, toilsome walk, and thinking very little about poor Harry.

"What a while Harry is," said Fred at last; "isn't he coming?"

"Oh, yes; he'll be here presently," said Philip; "he'll be sure to find us."

After a few minutes' pause, "What's that?" said Fred, pointing to some rustling and moving leaves close by the opening where they sat.

"Hush," said Philip; "don't move; it's a stoat or a weasel. You'll see him directly;" and in a moment after a long thin body came creeping out from the herbage. But it was neither weasel nor stoat, but a very large snake, which came right across the open space they were in—making Fred turn quite pale, for his imagination immediately whispered to him of poison fangs, rattlesnakes, cobras, and all sorts of venomous brutes. But the snake had no idea of touching the intruders on the silence of the forest, but made directly for a spot upon the other side of the opening, which he would soon have reached if it had depended upon Fred; but Philip possessed the animosity of his race against the serpent tribe, so caught up a rough branch that he had previously broken from a tree and slightly trimmed with his knife, and rushed after the retreating snake.

The poor thing struggled hard for its life and liberty, but in spite of its struggles and menacing attitude, Philip struck at it boldly with his stick and soon rendered his adversary hors de combat, when the victor dragged his prize to his companion, and displayed to his wondering gaze a snake upwards of a yard long, and very

thick. Philip then secured his trophy by slipping a noose of whipcord over its head, and tying it to his stick.

At last, time slipped by and no Harry made his appearance, while plenty of indications showed that evening was fast closing in: moths began to flutter about the different leaves; every now and then, too, came the low evening drowsy hum of the cockchafer, while Fred gave a regular jump when a gigantic stag-beetle stuck him right in the cheek and then fell crawling about in his lap.

"Ouf!" said Fred, "take the beast off. Is it poisonous?"

Philip laughed heartily at his cousin, as he assured him to the contrary; but the beetle saved him the trouble of brushing his horny body away by making a fresh flight, and disappearing over the trees.

"Come on," said Philip, "let's go."

"But how about Harry?" said Fred.

"Oh, we'll go and find him," and so the lads pushed right ahead as they thought, and in the direction in which Harry's voice was last heard; but they soon grew bewildered, and at last stood gazing disconsolately at one another, and then, as is stated at the beginning of this chapter, "Whoo-oo-oo-oop!" sang out Philip.

"Hoop—hoop—hoop!" shouted Fred as loudly as he could, and then, feeling the loneliness oppress him more than he could bear, he sat down on a stump, and seemed half disposed to cry.

"Oh, I say," said Philip, who was nearly as bad, "don't look like that, or we shall never get out of the wood. Don't you know what a many times Robert Bruce tried before he got his kingdom? Let's try again; the wood is not so very big, and we must come out somewhere."

"Do you think we ever shall get out again?" said Fred.

"Oh, of course we shall," said Philip, "and there ain't no wild beasts or anything of that kind, so come on and let's start."

And start they did—creeping through some bushes, pushing others aside, but somehow or another getting flogged by the returning twigs, and scratched by the brambles in a way they had not suffered in the morning. Once Fred tripped over a stump and fell heavily down, where he lay crying silently, but without trying to get up again; and it was only by Philip dragging at him that he could be got upon his legs. Duskier grew the wood, till under the big trees it was quite dark; but Philip pressed manfully on, though he felt completely bewildered; still his good sense told him that they must eventually find an outlet.

On and on they went, slowly and toilsomely, and still nothing but trees and bushes, looking gloomy and shadowy—very different to the appearance presented in the afternoon when the sun shone upon them, sending a checkery shade amongst the waving grass; and at last Philip felt his heart sink within him at the hopelessness of his task. All at once a happy thought struck the boy as they stood in a more open space, where they could see the stars shining down brightly upon them.

"I say, Fred," he said, "hasn't your papa ever told you about how the people used to guide their ships by the stars."

"No," said Fred moodily, "but I have heard they used to."

"Well" said Philip, "let's see if we can't get out that way. I think we can. I know which is the North-pole star, because Papa showed them all to us; and there it is,"

said the boy, joyfully, “That’s the north, and right hand will be west, and left hand east; no, it won’t, it will be right hand east, and left hand west. That’s right, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I dare say it is,” said Fred, dolefully.

“Well, when we are at home the wood lies in the west, because the sun sets behind it in the evening, so we must travel to the east, and then we shall be going towards home; and we have been going south, because I was looking that way, and had to turn round to find the Pole Star. Come on, Fred, we’ll soon be home now.”

“Oh, dear,” said Fred, “let’s lie down and go to sleep; I’ve got such a blister on my toe.”

“No, come on,” said the other, “for poor Mamma will be so frightened.”

“Oh, and won’t Uncle be cross?” said Fred.

This last remark almost frightened Philip out of his hurry to get home, for he directly felt disposed to put off the evil—the scolding that he expected to receive; but the knowledge that it would be making bad worse, if he loitered now, made him summon up the determination to proceed; and it required no little determination, for, since they had been star-gazing, their joints had grown stiff; aches and pains had come upon them; and they both would have given anything to have gone to sleep where they were.

“Oh, do come on,” said Philip at last, roughly shaking Fred. “It ain’t far now; for I remember that the wood is very long, but not very broad from east to west, so if we keep walking east we shall soon get out.”

So onward they pressed again, very slowly and laboriously, for about another half-hour, and then Philip stumbled and fell, for a spiteful bramble had caught him by the foot, and the poor boy could hold up no longer; he had cheered his cousin on in every way he could, and taken the lead throughout, though his heart was sinking, and he knew the trouble all proceeded from their own folly; but though he kept down his faint-heartedness and tried manfully to put a bold face on the matter, he was beaten, thoroughly beaten, at last, and lay upon the dewy grass, completely jaded, and without energy or spirit to make another attempt, while Fred, seeing his cousin’s heart fail, broke down as well.

But all at once Philip’s eyes brightened, and he started up as though touched by the wire of an electrical machine.

“Bow-wow-wow; wuph, wuph, wuph!” sounded upon the clear night air.

“Trill—lill—lill—lill—chug—chug—chug—chug—chug!” rang out the sweet notes of a nightingale close by; and then again—

“Bow-wow-wow; wuph, wuph, wuph!” from a dog apparently not far off.

“Come on,” said Philip again, with fresh energy; and casting one glance up at the stars, he pushed forward due east for about a dozen yards with Fred close behind him, and then, forcing his way through a dense hazel stub, he made a step forward, slipped, and went down crash into a deep ditch. But he did not stop in despair this time, although scratched and bruised, for he was out of the wood, and leaping up he stood upon the green turf by the side of the white chalky road.

“Jump, Fred,” he exclaimed, “right over the ditch.”

Fred jumped; but instead of jumping right over he jumped right in, and had to be helped out by Philip; but he shared in his companion's renewed spirit, and now stood with him in the dusty road looking about.

"Bow-wow-wow; wuph, wuph!" barked the dog again.

"Why, I know where we are," said Philip; "that's Mr Benson's farm, and we are six miles away from home. Never mind; let's go and tell Mrs Benson, I know she will let us rest a little while."

Fred was willing enough, and in a minute or two they stood under the porch of the old farm-house, with the dewy roses bending over them as they rapped at the door; while all the time the dog in the yard rattled his chain, and made a terrible disturbance.

"If you please, Mrs Benson," said Philip, as the door opened and a comely, motherly young face appeared; "if you please, Mrs Benson, we lost our way in the wood—and—and—and—and oh, dear! oh, dear; what shall I do!" sobbed poor Philip, now out of his peril but thoroughly beaten, "what shall I do?" and then he sobbed and cried as though his heart would break, Fred helping him him to the best of his ability.

"Why, thee poor dear bairns!" said Mrs Benson; "come in, and sit thee down.—Why, one of 'em's Squire Inglis's Philip, John," she continued to her husband, "and here they be ammost bet out."

Mrs Benson could talk, but she could act as well, and she soon had the two lads upon the snug "keeping-room" sofa.

"Bless thou, my poor bairns!" she exclaimed; and then in a breath to her husband. "Thou'dst better send Tom over to the Grange, and tell them where the poor things are, or they'll be frightened to death; and let him tell Mrs Inglis well drive them over as we go to market in the morning."

So off packed Mr Benson to send the messenger, while his wife bustled the great red-armed maid about; and then with warm water and towels bathed the boys' faces and hands, and brushed their hairs, as though she had done it every day since they were babies; while during all this time the red-armed maid had spread a cloth on one end of the table and tea-things on the other, while Farmer Benson, who had been taking his evening pipe and hot gin and water when the boys knocked at the door, now insisted upon their each taking a sip or two out of his glass. Directly after there was a steaming hot cup of tea before each visitor, with plenty of rich yellow cream in it, while Mrs Benson cut from a sweet-scented light-brown-crusted home-baked loaf slices which were as though made of honeycomb, and which she gilded over with the bright golden butter from her own snowy churn. Mr Benson; too, he could not be idle, so he cut two great wedges out of a raised pork pie, and placed in the boys' plates—pie that looked all of a rich marble jelly, veined with snow-white fat, and so tempting after some hours' ramble in the woods.

"I ham glad thou came, bairns," said Mrs Benson, kissing her visitors in the most motherly way imaginable.

"Ay, lads, and so am I; but there, doan't take on. Yeat, lads, yeat, and then ye'll soon be all right again."

And the boys choked down their sobs, and did "yeat" in a way that made their worthy host and hostess smile with pleasure, as well as to see the faces that a few

minutes before looked so worn, pale, and wretched, brightening up under the treatment their complaint was receiving.

All at once Philip came to a stand-still, and said, “I wonder where Harry is?”

“What! was he out with thee?” said the farmer and his wife.

“Yes,” said Philip, “and he had got Dick with him.”

“Ah!” said the farmer, “I don’t know Dick. Who’s he?”

“Why, our rough dog,” said Philip; “the ratter.”

“Oh, ah, ha!” said the farmer; “so he had Dick with him, had he?”

“Yes,” said Philip, mournfully, and with another great sob creeping up his throat.

“Theer, theer,” said Mr Benson, “doan’t do that, bairn. He’s safe enough if he’s got that dog wi’ him; he’d be sewer to find the way out o’ the wood.”

This seemed to act as a kind of comfort to Philip, who resumed his meal, but only to find out a new trouble directly after. “Where’s my snake?” he exclaimed, jumping up, and looking at the end of the rough stick he had brought in with him. But nobody knew, so nobody replied to his question; the snake was gone, for it had not been even remembered all through the time of their bewilderment, and now that it was brought to mind there was not even a trace of the whipcord.

“Now, my dears,” said Mrs Benson, seeing that the lads had finished their meal,—“now, my dears, I have had clean sheets put on the best bed, so, if I was you, I should go and have a good rest.”

But Mrs Benson’s motherly ideas were put to the rout by the sound of wheels and directly after a horse was pulled up at the gate. Some one rapped at the door, and, upon its being opened, in rushed Dick, closely followed by Mr Inglis, Harry, and Mr Benson’s lad, Tom, who had not gone far upon the road before he met the above party in search of the lost ones. They had been making inquiries all down the road at every cottage they passed, and it was during one of these stoppages that Tom recognised Mr Inglis’s voice, and brought him on to the farm.

The first act of Dick on entering the room was to leap upon Philip and Fred, and bark as loudly as he could—scampering round the place, and at last misbehaving so much that he had to be turned out, to stay outside the door, howling, till his master was ready to start again.

Harry, who looked a perfect scarecrow, grinned with delight upon seeing his lost companions found, while Mr Inglis warmly thanked the farmer and his wife for their hospitality, and then, refraining from uttering any words of blame, hurried the lads into the four-wheeled chaise, so as to hasten home to quiet the alarm of Mrs Inglis, who was, of course, in a state of great anxiety.

“Good-byes” were said, and promises made to go and see Mrs Benson again, and then off trotted the horse, and round spun the wheels; while Dick every now and then gave a short bark, evidently of pleasure at being allowed to ride. As for Philip and Fred, they were both soon fast asleep, with their heads nodding and rolling about enough to shake them off.

At last the Grange was reached, Mrs Inglis’s fears set at rest, and, half-asleep, all three boys were soon up in their bedrooms, and the next morning, when the eight o’clock bell rang, more soundly asleep than ever, so that they had to be shaken and shouted at to make them get up, which they did at last, yawning fearfully, and feeling so stiff, sore, and aching, that they could scarcely move.

Chapter 8

A short Scolding.

SOON AFTER breakfast on the morning after the wander in Beechy Wood, Mr Inglis sent for his sons and Fred to come to the library, into which room they all walked, after having almost a scuffle outside the door to decide who should be the first to enter, the scuffle resulting in Fred being made the advance-guard, and pushed in before his cousins; Harry, being the most active, securing to himself the last place. The boys were in a dreadful fidget: they had done wrong, and they knew it well, and therefore felt prepared to receive a terrible scolding; but the anticipation proved worse than the punishment itself, for Mr Inglis looked up smiling when they entered, and seeing Harry's scheming to get last, called him at once to the front, and said—

"Now, boys, you see that if you had behaved rightly yesterday all that trouble and inconvenience would have been spared to us all. I cannot say that you acted in direct disobedience to what you were told, for you had no commands; but you all well knew that you had no right to go to Beechy Wood, which is of course proved by your hiding your intentions from Mamma. But, there, I am not going to scold, for you have all been well punished; but, my boys, I want you to promise me one thing, and that is, that full confidence shall always exist between us. I want my boys to grow up men of honour—Englishmen whose word and every action can be looked upon as the very essence of truth and openness. I want you to love, and not to fear me; and, there now, that's all over, we must not make Fred miserable, so we will dine early, and start this afternoon for a couple of hours' fishing; so bustle about, boys, and get all the baits and tackle ready."

But they could not bustle just then, for—

But, there, I won't say anything about it, for the library door was shut, and of course I could only be supposed to know what took place from seeing some eyes looking rather red, and hearing noses blown rather loudly, besides knowing that all three boys wanted dry pocket handkerchiefs, when at last they did come out of the library, Mr Inglis shaking hands with them as he closed the door.

As they stood upon the mat outside, "I say," said Harry, with a great gulp something like a sob, "I say, ain't he a jolly father?"

Chapter 9

Which is rather fishy.

THAT VERY same afternoon, Dusty Bob was in the mill, looking dustier than ever, and trying, as he sat upon a sack of corn that had come to be ground, to

spell out the contents of the county paper; but he did not get on very fast, for the white or papery part had, through ill-usage, turned very black, and the black or printed part, by means of the fine flour dust, turned very white. Joining to this the fact that Bob was, as he expressed it, "no skollard," it may easily be judged that he did not arrive at very correct ideas respecting the news of the day, or rather of the day a month ago; for Dusty Bob did not indulge in the luxury of new news, but bought it fifth, sixth, or seventh hand, not disdaining sometimes the piece which had come from the grocer's shop wrapping up the pound of salt. The mill was not quite so noisy this afternoon as upon the last occasion when we were all here together, for the flood had gone down, and there was no rush and hurried turmoil from the portion of the river passing down by the waste-water, while the mill wheels turned slowly and steadily round as a sheet of crystal clearness flowed upon them from the great dam.

"Ah, aw, yaw—yaw, aw," said Bob, bursting out into such a yawn that his not very handsome face looked as if it had been cut in two. "Aw, yaw, aw, aw, heigho—ha, ha—hum."

"Knock, knock; rap, rap, rap."

"Hah! more corn; more corn; more corn. Tain't no use to bring't, a bit; for we have more noo than we've got watter for; and then yow'll come grummle, grummle, grummle, because 'tisn't doone; sow yow'd betther tak't somewheres else."

"Knock, knock; rap, rap, rap," came the summons at the gate again; and this time, instead of muttering and "grumbling" to himself, Dusty Bob got up and went to see who was there.

"Sarvant, sir," said Bob, as he saw who it was, and then burst out into a grin; for behind Squire Inglis stood his visitors of a few days before, and Bob was luxuriating in the recollection of how he had restored the lost basket of fish.

"Well, Bob," said Mr Inglis, entering the mill, followed by the three boys, each armed with a fishing-rod and basket, big enough apparently to hold a great many more fish than they would catch that afternoon; "Well, Bob," said Mr Inglis, "how are you off for fish?"

"Heaps on 'em, sir, down below in the pool; but I'm 'feard they weant feed, for it's rather a bad time. Thou'd best fish off the right bank just over the stream from number one wheel. There be plenty o' fishing, for this mornin', only, when the mill was stopped for half-an-hour, the great fat chub lay a-top of the water as long as your arm ammost; but I'm most 'feard that the roach weant look at a bait."

Bob then led the way through the mill, and the fishing-party soon stood on the long, narrow, tree-o'ershadowed strip of land that separated the mill tail from the waste-water; and here, where the stream ran swiftly and deeply, did the party prepare to secure some of the finny treasures.

Rods were quickly put together; lines securely fixed; and best new gut hooks added. Then the depth was plumbed; the floats adjusted and shotted to the correct "cock;" and then hooks baited, and ground-bait of bran and clay and rice thrown upon the mill apron, to dissolve slowly and spread all over the pool. Lastly, lines are thrown in, and silence proclaimed, so that the first nibbles might be duly attended to.

In every place where there are fish one is sure to hear of a mighty jack that lies out in some particular part, and is occasionally seen in the early morning, or

basking in the mid-day sun, looking almost as big as a man,—in fact, so big that nobody could catch him, one that ever so many fishermen had had hold of, but which always broke away and escaped; and somehow or other, although this mighty fellow must have swallowed and got stuck in his mouth and gills enough hooks, and trailing away from him enough line, to stock a small shop, yet, leave alone being caught, he never even dies, and floats wrong way up on the top of the water. Well, this was the case here: Bob had seen a pike so big that no mortal rod and line could ever bear it; he could tell of somewhere about ten or a dozen fishermen who had once had hold of him, so that Mr Jack must have thought no more of the sharpest barbed hooks than he would of so many quill toothpicks.

"Lord, sir," said Bob, "whoy doan't thee trowl for the big jack? I see him this morning ligging a-top of the waiter like a big log o' wood."

"Indeed, Bob; well, I'll try for a few chub first, and then, if unsuccessful, see what I can do in the pike way."

So Mr Inglis fished very patiently and quietly for some time, and tried two or three different kinds of bait to tempt the chubby fellows; but they would not be tempted, until at last a small gudgeon was placed on the hook, one which Fred had caught, being the first fish taken that afternoon, for Bob had turned out a very respectable prophet, and the boys were having very poor sport indeed.

And now Mr Inglis tried in all the most likely spots for a chub with his live-bait, and at last one took it, was struck, and then darted away swift as an arrow from a bow—right, left, straight ahead, through the smooth water, and off again where the stream ran swiftest; but it was of no avail; the line that he had run out was wound up, and the fine fellow drawn inshore so closely that Harry could put the landing-net under him, and then, with a tremendous burst of impotent flapping and splashing, a great chub about two pounds and a half weight was laid upon the grass, with his broad scales glistening in the sun.

"That's a napper," said Bob.

"Oh—oh—oh—oh!" burst in chorus from the boys—a shout of pleasure nearly turned into a groan, for Philip, in lifting the fish to put him in the basket, felt it give a great spring, which so startled him that he dropped it, so there it lay close to the edge of the wood embankment, and a single flap of his tail would have borne him away; but time enough was not allowed, for Harry pounced upon him like a cat after a mouse, and, in spite of his slimy jacket, he was soon safely shut down in one of the baskets.

The boys kept on with indifferent success—only securing a few small roach and gudgeon; and Mr Inglis, too, seemed as though he would have no further good fortune, for the chub appeared to have turned sulky because their big companion was taken away, and would not even smell the gudgeon. At last, however, Mr Inglis made a cast, and the little bait-fish fell lightly just beneath a bush close under the bank; when there was a rush through the water, and a swirling that took everybody's attention, and then, as Mr Inglis swiftly drew out the line from off his reel, away it glided through the rings of the rod, yard after yard—yard after yard—swifter and swifter—as though the fish that had taken the gudgeon meant to run the line all out; and sure enough it did the whole fifty yards; and Mr Inglis was reaching out his rod as far as he could stretch his hand, so as to avoid checking the fish, if possible, and so losing it, when the line suddenly grew slack.

There all eyes were strained towards the spot where the large tell-tale cork-float slowly rose to the surface, and its white top could be seen stationary right on the far side of the mill-pool. What little slack line there was, Mr Inglis now wound in, and telling Harry to be ready with the landing-net, he waited patiently for a few minutes to give the fish time to gorge his prey, though, from the way in which the float had run to the surface, he was afraid that the fish had left his bait. At last, Mr Inglis gathered the line up in his hand, and gave a sharp twist of his wrist, and all eyes were bent upon the spot to witness the struggle; but alas! there was no resistance. The great float glided easily over the water, and then Mr Inglis began to wind in, for it was evident that the pike had merely taken the bait because he could not bear to see it pass him—not because he was hungry—and then, after playing with it, let it go again.

"Never mind, boys," said the Squire, "better success next time."

The words, however, were hardly out of his mouth, when there was a tremendous swirl and rush again in the water; and away with a bob—bob—bob—went the float, then under water, and out of sight once more.

There was another pause of five minutes, and then again Mr Inglis drew in what slack line there was very carefully, waited another minute, when, the float again rose to the surface, but only to move off in another direction, for it was evident that the pike had this time well taken the bait.

And now followed moments of interest, as the Squire struck the fish, and then gave him line, for with one flick of his great tail he went across the pool in a fresh direction, luckily making a great deal of slack line as he did so. The battle now began in real earnest, for every time the pike felt the line tightened away he darted, first in one direction, and then in another, while once he came close in to where his tormentor was standing, so that a great deal of the running line was wound in; but, the moment after, he started off with a swifter rush than ever right across the pool, making the line sing and the winch spin furiously, as the thin cord ran through the rings as it was reeled off. Mr Inglis had to slightly check the line so as to retard his progress, or else most probably the cord would have been snapped; but no sooner did the fish find that he was held than he made a leap of fully a yard right out of the water, displaying to the lookers-on his great gold and green sides, and looking, in the momentary glance that was afforded, almost a yard long.

In he dashed again, full of fury, and round and round, and backwards and forwards, he was played; at one time sweeping right up to the mill wheels, and nearly getting the line entangled in the piles; then making a mighty spurt to gain the river where the weeds grew so thickly; but he got no farther than the sandy bar at the mouth of the pool, where he had to turn on one side to swim in the shallows, for here he was checked again, and brought back almost unresisting into the deep water, his master's rod bending like a cart-whip as the fish was dragged back. And so for nearly half an hour did the battle continue, the fish being gently brought back after every dash he made, for Mr Inglis dared not attempt to land the monster till he was thoroughly exhausted; and well was it that the line was one of the newest and strongest, or the slight silk cord would never have borne the strain that was put upon it... But it held good, and now the exhausted fish seemed to make its last effort to escape; and it was very nearly a

successful one, for, after darting about ten yards almost to the bottom of the pool, Mr Inglis found that there was some extra resistance, and that the line was entangled.

Had this happened earlier in the struggle, the pike must have been lost, for the line would have snapped; but now the fish had fought out his fight, and scarcely attempted to move, while Dusty Bob, who had been watching the proceedings with the most intense interest, went to the mill-yard and fetched the great rake he used to clear the weeds away with, and by means of a little raking he got hold of the obstruction, which upon being drawn to the surface proved to be an old branch, and round a rugged part the line was just hitched. A sharp blow from the rake snapped the bough in two, and the line was again at liberty, the great fish being drawn to the side at the mouth of the pool, where the water was only a few inches deep, and landed amidst a burst of cheers from the delighted boys, while even Bob gave a loud "Hooray," though he seemed rather sorry than otherwise that the water should lose so fine a fish; but the "Hooray" was brought forth by the thoughts of a prospective shilling which Mr Inglis would most likely give him, and then perhaps he would have to carry the fish home as well, and get some bread and cheese and ale up at the house.

So "Hooray," said Dusty Bob, with a most hypocritical countenance; and "Hooray—ay—ay—ay—ay—ay," cheered the boys again; and there were no end of epithets lavished upon the fish, such as "Beauty," "Monster," "Jolly one." etc, etc, for the admiration of the party seemed boundless.

Bob then had to carry the pike into the mill, where it was put into the flour-scales and weighed, and found to balance nineteen pounds and a half in the weight-scale—an announcement which was received with renewed cheers; and upon measurement he was found to be two feet six inches long; while of all the mouths that ever pike had, his seemed the widest and fullest of long hooked teeth—projecting backwards, so as to render it impossible for a fish to escape out of his jaws if once he caught hold of it.

This brought the fishing to a conclusion for that afternoon; and so the lines were wound up, rods disjointed and placed in their bags, and all the rest of the angling paraphernalia collected into the baskets, while one was expressly devoted to the fish. But now a new difficulty arose—the chub could be got into the basket, but how about a pike two feet six inches long? Then, too, Bob wanted to carry the pike right up to the house—evidently meaning to make a show of it by the way, so as to be asked to have a glass of beer or two for his trouble. But this was an honour that Bob was not to have, for the boys were almost squabbling as to who should have the duty. Fred, however, soon backed out, for while touching the pike, and feeling its weight, it bent itself like a bow, and then gave such a spring that he jumped away as thou eh be had been shot, and directly waived all claims to the honour of carriage, which now lay between Harry and Philip, who at last grew so warm on the subject, that one had hold of the head and the other the tail, the latter place of vantage being occupied by Harry, and a matter of French and English tugging was about to commence when Mr Inglis interposed, and settled the matter by arranging that Philip should carry the trophy half-way, and Harry the remainder: which decision had hardly been arrived at, when Master Harry

must try whether the pike would bite; which he did by holding the gasping mouth to the tail of Dusty Bob's coat.

Whether sensible that it was biting or no, the fish's mouth closed upon the floury cloth, and held there with such tenacity that the piece had to be cut out—so firmly were the jagged and hooked teeth inserted in the woolly fabric.

This, of course, produced a scolding for Master Harry for his mischievous trick, and a piece of coin for Bob to get the hole repaired; and then the party returned in triumph to tea—the boys as proud of their acquisition as any Roman conqueror who led his treasure-burdened slave through the streets of the city of Romulus.

Chapter 10

A sad Affair.

"OH DO come in, Fred!" said Harry, blowing and splashing about in the water like a small whale, on the day following the fishing excursion. The lads were down by the side of the river, in a spot called Withy Nook—a green snug place entirely sheltered from all observation—a spot with the emerald grass sloping down to where the river ran by, sparkling and dancing in the golden sunlight, flashing back the bright rays from the tiny wavelets, and making the golden waterlilies rise and fall as they rode upon the bright surface. The water was so limpid that the sand and clean washed pebbles could be easily seen at the bottom, except when the water was put in a state of turmoil by the antics of the two boys who were bathing.

"Oh do come in, Fred!" echoed Philip; "it isn't a bit cold, and not deep; and you ought to learn to float and swim."

"Oh come on," said Harry again.

Fred felt that he would like to go in and have a dip, for the water looked so cool and bright and clear; but there was a certain amount of timidity to be got over; he had never been in anything but a bath in his life, and plunging at once into a river was a novel feat that he could hardly summon courage to attempt. But at last the persuasions of his cousins had the desired effect, and Fred quickly undressed, and then stood upon the bank, afraid to take his first dip; but again were the persuasions of his cousins brought into play, and the London boy took his first step into the water, and then made a half slip, so that he came down sideways and went right under the surface, but regained his feet, with the water singing and rumbling in his ears, his eyes close shut, and the drops streaming down him as fast as they could run.

"Oh—ah—ah," said Fred, gasping.

"Haw—haw—haw!" burst from Harry, as he laughed heartily at his cousin.

"Don't grin like that, Hal," said Philip, helping Fred out of his difficulty, and steadying him as he stood breast high in the water, rubbing his eyes, and trying to get rid of the feeling of bewilderment that had come over him upon his sudden immersion.

“Oh, isn’t it queer?” said Fred, as soon as he had finished gasping, and spitting out the water he had in his mouth.

“Not a bit of it,” said Harry, “only you were in such a hurry to get under the water. Now, then, try and swim: see me go dog’s paddle,” and then the young dog set to paddling away as though he had lived in the water half his lifetime. “Hold his chin up, Phil, and he’ll soon do it.”

But Fred did not want to have his chin held up, nor yet to be touched; he preferred to wade gently about in the clear water by himself, while his cousins swam backwards and forwards across the river—here not twenty yards broad.

“Make haste and learn to swim, Fred, it’s so easy,” said Harry, “and such capital fun. Look here; see me dive.” And then, turning heels upwards in the water, he went down out of sight, to Fred’s great horror, but came up again directly, and then floated upon his back, swam sideways, and did other feats that seemed to Fred little short of wonders—so easily and deftly were they performed.

“Now then, Phil,” said Harry, “I’ll race you up to the pollard, and back to Fred. Come on!”

Philip did “come on,” and the boys swam up stream towards the willow pollard which overhung the river about fifty yards off. Away they went, working away manfully, for it was hard work against the running water. Sometimes Philip got a little ahead, and sometimes it was Harry; but Philip was first when they reached the pollard-tree, and he kept ahead, too, as they came easily back down stream towards the spot from whence they started.

“Hallo!” puffed out Harry, all at once, “where’s Fred?”

“Got out,” gasped Philip, for he was getting out of breath with his exertions.

“No, he hasn’t; I can’t see him,” said Harry, getting excited. “He’s got out of his depth and gone down stream! Oh, dear! oh, dear! what shall we do?”

Just then Philip caught sight of something white slowly washing over the shallows lower down the stream, and he called his brother’s attention to it. “It’s Fred,” said Harry, swimming as hard as he could. “Come on.” Saying which he dashed out of the water and ran along the bank till he came opposite the place, where sure enough poor Fred was slowly drifting over the shallow pebbly-bottomed stream; and then both lads dashed in and, by using great efforts, dragged their cousin inshore, and got him upon the bank.

“Put your trousers and jacket on, and run for Papa, Harry,” cried Philip, as he gazed upon the inanimate countenance of Fred, and tried in vain to open the eyes which kept so obstinately closed.

Harry was not long in obeying his brother’s hint, and in less than ten minutes Mr Inglis, with a couple of the farm-labourers carrying blankets, arrived upon the spot. Very little was said, but in a few minutes more poor Fred was carried off to the Grange; while his cousins stopped behind, shivering with cold and fear, to finish dressing themselves.

Upon reaching home they found the house in the greatest confusion; one servant was watching at the front door so as to give the earliest notice of the doctor’s coming, for a man had been sent for him at full gallop; another was running backwards and forwards from the kitchen carrying hot blankets; while Mr and Mrs Inglis were doing all that lay in their power to restore animation; but all

seemed as yet in vain, and when Harry and Philip crept on tiptoe into the bedroom, they trembled at the ghastly look their cousin wore.

Poor Mrs Inglis seemed quite in despair, and would have ceased her efforts but for the Squire, who warned her to persevere, saying that people had been revived even after ill success for two hours or more; and, apparently hopeless as the case seemed, he kept on himself moving the body on to one side and back again with a regular motion, so as to endeavour to promote artificial respiration. On the table was a number of "The Life Boat," which contained full instructions for recovering the apparently drowned; and to this Mr Inglis kept making references, and giving his instructions accordingly.

At length there was the distant sound of a horse's feet coming at a gallop along the road; they soon came along the gravel drive, were heard to stop, and then in came quickly, but with a step soft as that of a cat, that awe-inspiring personage—the Doctor. He saw at a glance what had been done, and nodded his satisfaction, then examined the pupil of poor Fred's eye, felt his pulse, and listened at his chest; and afterwards, drawing off his coat and kneeling by the bedside, continued the efforts that Mr Inglis had so well commenced.

An hour—a long, long hour—one with leaden seconds—slipped by during which time not an effort was relaxed; though the faces of Mr and Mrs Inglis betrayed the despair that had crept over them, while Harry and Philip sobbed so that they had to be sent out of the room; when they stifled the sobs as well as they could, and crept back to the door, where they sat listening outside.

All this time the Doctor's face had been as solid as a block of marble, not a trace of any emotion—hopeful or despairing—appeared; he kept on giving order after order, and worked till the perspiration stood in great drops upon his brow; and still no sign of life. The tears coursed silently down Mrs Inglis's face, and it was only by a great effort that she could keep from sobbing. Glad would she have been to have left the room, but a sense of duty forbade her, and she stayed, lending all the assistance that lay in her power.

All at once, the Doctor brightened up, and turning to the Squire said, "Now, I'll have a glass of sherry and a biscuit."

Mr Inglis saw nothing to cause the cheerful way in which the Doctor spoke, but felt that he must have a good reason for hope, or he would not have spoken so lightly. So, ringing the bell for the refreshment, he leaned over the poor boy, and, as he did so, a faint, a very faint, sigh escaped from his chest, and then there was a slight twitching of his eyelids.

"There," said the Doctor, wiping his forehead, and turning upon Mr and Mrs Inglis with a delighted aspect,—"there, I don't believe another medical man in the county would have persevered to that extent, and saved the boy's life; but, there, all the credit belongs to Mr Inglis for commencing the work so well."

"No; it's not due to me. If it had not been for that book on the table," said he, pointing to the little pamphlet, "I should not have known how to proceed."

"Ah, well," said the Doctor, "then we will say it was all due to the Life Boat Institution."

But all this while no efforts were relaxed, for, though symptoms of revival were plainly to be seen, they were like the flickerings of the wick of a lamp, liable at a moment to become extinct; but the endeavours of those present supplied the

needful oil, and by slow degrees the cadaverous hue disappeared from Fred's face; his breathing became firmer and more regular; and at last his eyes opened, staring vacantly at the ceiling, and those bending over him; but, after another lapse of time, a light seemed to be added to the vacant look, and, to the intense delight of all, a smile came over his pale face as he recognised Mr and Mrs Inglis. It was thought better that the lads should not come in at present, so the joyful new was conveyed to them outside the door in a whisper; and then off and away went Harry, followed by his brother, to perform a kind of triumphal war-dance down in the dining-room, where he could make a little noise without being overheard in the sick chamber.

Not very long afterwards, the Doctor took his departure, promising to return in the course of an hour or two; and then Mr and Mrs Inglis came into the room where the boys were, and, announcing; that Fred was in a calm sleep, with one of the maids watching by his side, they asked how the poor fellow came to be so nearly drowned.

This was a question that neither Harry nor Philip could answer; but they told what they knew, and could only suppose that he had walked out of his depth, when the swiftness of the current, and his own timidity, had prevented him from regaining his footing. So that the full explanation had to remain until Fred was in a condition to give it himself.

Mr Inglis talked long and seriously to the boys; but he felt that he could not blame them much, as bathing was an habitual thing with them in the summer-time, and moreover a most healthy habit: joined to which, for such young lads, both Harry and Philip were powerful swimmers. But the act for which Mr Inglis blamed them was not for inducing their cousin to bathe, but leaving him, ignorant as he was of the power of the current, by himself.

"I think, Mamma," said the Squire, at last, "we had better send poor Fred home again. Here in a space of time of only two or three days has he been lost in the wood; and, but for the blessing of God, he would have this day been drowned."

"Oh! pray—pray don't send him away, Papa," pleaded both the lads at once. "We will be so careful for the future. And—and," said Harry, breaking down as he spoke; "and—and—indeed, Papa, I wish it had been me to-day sooner than poor Fred, for we do feel that we ought to take care of him when he's a visitor; don't we, Philip? But I am such an unlucky beggar; I'm always doing something wrong when I want to do right, and it does make me so miserable, and so it did when I pitched into Fred the first afternoon he was here, and I couldn't help it."

"What's that?" said Mr Inglis; "pitched into Fred? What, have you two been fighting?"

Harry was in too great trouble to speak, so Philip narrated the little skirmish, concluding with the loss of the poor ferret.

Mr Inglis did not say any more upon the subject; but a smile passed between him and Mrs Inglis, and then, shaking hands with his boys, they all went on tiptoe up the stairs to have a look at Fred—Mr Inglis, in spite of the events of the past few days, evidently of the opinion that his boys were not so much worse than boys in general.

Fred was fast asleep, breathing regularly; and the maid said he had not moved; so he was left to his rest, strict injunctions being given that Mrs Inglis should be called directly the invalid woke, or showed symptoms of so doing.

Chapter 11

Bumpitty Bump—The Wopses.

FOR TWO or three days Fred remained very unwell, as might easily be supposed from the shock he had received; but the boys spent the greater part of the days with him reading or playing, and in the evenings came Mr and Mrs Inglis to sit in his bedroom, when Mr Inglis told them natural history anecdotes, or talked about the wondrous changes of insects in so interesting a manner, that the little auditory heard him with the most rapt attention.

On the second evening, in answer to a question, Fred related how it was he managed to be carried away by the stream. It appeared that it was through a sudden fright; for, while wading about with the water up to his armpits, he felt what he thought was a great fish touch him—but which was more probably a piece of wood—and he was so startled and alarmed with the idea that it might be a great pike, such as he had once seen in the river, and also caught by Mr Inglis, that he rushed away from the fancied peril, and, by mishap, this was done on the wrong side; so that directly afterwards he was splashing and paddling in the water, out of his depth, and with the stream bearing him away quite fast. He could remember the water bubbling and thundering in his ears as he was swept away; two or three great struggles to reach the side, and then it seemed like going to sleep, and waking to find himself in his bed, with three faces leaning over him, and everything else misty and bewildered.

On the morning of the fourth day, Fred was up again and out with his cousins before breakfast, getting their feet well soaked by the dewy grass out in the cedar-field as they took it in turns to have a ride upon the pony—one boy running by his side once up and down the field, and holding the pony by his halter. He was a capital quiet fellow, was old Dumpling, and put up with the tricks of his young masters as good-naturedly as possibly, and, on the whole, rather seeming to join in the fun, for he stood perfectly still by their side while they climbed up the fence, and from thence on to his back, and then went along at a jig-jog trot, just as they wished him. As for Harry and Philip, they were well used to being upon his back; but when it came to Fred's turn, he prepared to mount with considerable trepidation.

It might almost have been thought that, after the last unpleasant adventure, Fred would have been very diffident in joining in any of his cousins' rather boisterous amusements; but he had a most wholesome dread of being looked upon as a coward: the very idea of being despised by his cousins rendered him ready to dare anything; so that, no matter what they had pressed him to, he would most probably have attempted it, however strongly his reason or inclination might have

prompted him otherwise; so, when it came to his turn, he followed the instructions of his cousins, and made a sort of half leap or vault upon the pony's back; but in so doing he overshot the mark, and went scrambling down, head first, on the other side. The pony, however, never moved, and as Fred was not hurt, he climbed the fence for another try, and this time came down just in the right place, but in doing so, stuck his heels so tightly into the nag's side, that, without waiting for the leader to take hold of the halter, away he started at a canter, greatly to Fred's dismay, for the bumping he received seemed something fearful to him, and he had no small difficulty in keeping his seat; but keep it he did, and the pony cantered away till nearly at the bottom of the field, when he subsided into a trot, the boys behind in full chase, laughing and cheering away as hard as they could. Trot—trot, went the pony, and Fred thought it was horrible, for it rucked his trousers up, and shook and bumped him ten times more than when he was cantering. But Fred was too much of a stoic to find fault, and sat it out famously, for Harry now caught up to him, and, seizing the halter, ran by his side till they reached the fence again, when Fred dismounted.

"Why, I thought you said that you couldn't ride!" said Philip, now coming up quite out of breath. "Why, you ride better than we do; don't he, Hal?"

"Ride! of course he can," said Harry, "better than I can; but a couple of old clothes-props, tied together, and put straddling over the pony, would ride better than—Oh! don't, Phil, it hurts," he continued, as Philip indulged his brother with a few thumps in the back to repay the compliment that he had given to the punisher.

"There goes the bell," said Fred, with a hunger-sharpened sense, running off full race towards the house, closely followed by his cousins, who could not, however, catch up to him until they reached the side-door, through which they all rushed together with such impetus, that they came in contact with Mary, who was carrying a plate of hot cake and some eggs into the breakfast parlour.

"Squawk," said Mary, as she was regularly upset, and they all went down—boys, plate, eggs, tray, and all—in one heap upon the passage floor.

Out came Mrs Inglis, and out came the Squire, and out ran the cook from the kitchen; and then everybody began to talk at once, so that the confusion grew worse than ever.

Master Harry was the first to get up, and, instead of trying to assist his companions in misfortune, or to rub the dust off his clothes, he began to collect the cake together; and, as the plate was broken, he very carefully arranged the three-cornered wedges on the top of his straw hat, as though the cake had been a puzzle.

As for Fred, he had quite a job to disentangle himself from Mary; for, when she was going down, she loosed her hold of the little tray she was carrying, and caught hold of Fred, and, of course, they went down together. But when Fred got up, he stood shaking his ear, and trying to get rid of the buzzing sound produced by Mary's piercing scream.

Philip was in the worst plight, for he went head first amongst the eggs, and was in consequence rather eggy. He was quite aware of his misfortune, and had been wiping the rich yolk off his face; but, not having a glass before him, he had made it rather smeary, and also left a goodly portion in the roots of his hair.

Poor Mary gathered herself up, sobbing half hysterically that it wasn't her fault. "No," said Harry, stoutly. "It wasn't Mary's fault. We all had a share in it."

As for Mr and Mrs Inglis, they took the sensible view of the case, that it was an accident, which only resulted in the breakage of a plate, and the loss of two or three eggs; for Harry declared that the cake was "All right," and they would eat it; go they returned to the breakfast-parlour, mutually glad that Mary was not bringing in the tea-urn, when the accident might have been of a very serious nature. But when the boys had made themselves respectable, and descended again to breakfast, all this involved some rather serious talk upon the part of Mr and Mrs Inglis, but did not seem to spoil the boys' breakfast the least bit in the world; while as to the cake, they said it wasn't a bit the worse, only rather gritty with a few little bits of china that had been left in from the broken plate.

"Well, boys," said Mr Inglis at last, "what have you been doing this morning?"

"Riding, Papa, in the field, and Fred, too. We had such capital fun, and old Dumpling seems to like it as well as any of us."

"Yes, I suppose so," said the Squire; "but I should think he liked it best when you left him in peace, and he had got rid of such a pack of wild young dogs, baiting and bothering him. Now," he continued, "what are we going to do to-day?"

"Let's go and catch another great pike," said Fred.

Mr Inglis laughed, and told him that they might go fifty times and not catch such another fish as the last; which I forgot to say in the proper place was baked by the cook, with what she called a pudding inside it, and eaten in triumph by the fishing-party, aided by Mrs Inglis, and declared to be the best fish that ever came out of the river.

"Let's go botanising, Papa," said Philip, "and go up the Camp Hill. It would be so nice, and then we should have to take our dinners with us, and Mamma would come too. Oh, do let's go there. You'll come, won't you, Mamma?"

But Mamma declined, for she had promised to go out for a drive with a near neighbour; but said that she should much enjoy, the trip upon another occasion. It was therefore decided that there should be a botanising trip on the next day but two, the following day being Saturday.

"Let's play cricket, Papa, and you come and bowl for us," said Harry.

"Bravo!" cried the others. "Oh do, Uncle oh do, Papa!"

But Uncle and Papa, though always ready to do anything to please his boys, seemed to think that bowling all day long, with the thermometer marking some few degrees above summer heat, was rather too arduous a task, so he declined, and said—

"Now, I think it comes to my turn to choose, and I'll tell you what I think; and that is, as several of the specimens in the butterfly cabinet are getting destroyed by the mites, we might take the nets and boxes, and have a very pleasant ramble by the side of Beechy Wood, and down the meadows, and then, if we happened to get so far, we could call and thank Mrs Benson again; and coming back to a late tea, we should find plenty of moths along by the wood-side."

"That's the best idea yet," said the boys; although it is most probable that they would have agreed to anything that Mr Inglis had proposed, and said it was the best idea that could have been thought of.

But this arrangement only provided for the afternoon: there was still the morning to be employed.

"If I were you, boys," said Mrs Inglis, "I should find something quiet to do indoors, and then you will not be tired before you start in the afternoon."

"Ah," said the Squire, "have a look at your lessons. You have not touched them all through the holidays."

"Oh-h-h—Ah-h-h—Er-r-r—Um-m-m," groaned the boys. "Oh, Pa; oh-h-h," they exclaimed, with such pitiful faces that any one might have thought that they had been required to quaff, each of them, a great goblet of salts and senna, or something equally nasty.

Mr and Mrs Inglis both laughed heartily, and the boys then saw that Papa was only joking, and the clouds disappeared from their faces instanter; and off they scampered into the garden to spend the morning quietly, so as not to be tired at the time appointed for starting.

"Come on, boys," said Harry, taking flying leaps over all the flower-beds in the parterre, as they went down the garden—greatly to the disgust of old Sam, who very reasonably said, "As flower-gardens warn't made to be jumped over;" and he then took off his old battered hat, and scratched his bald head viciously.

"Shouldn't I like to kick old Sam's hat!" said Philip; "he always will wear such an old scarecrow of a thing."

"I say, Sam," said Harry, grinning, "we are going to stop quietly in the garden all the morning and help you."

Sam grinned too, as he looked sideways at the mischievous laughing face beside him.

"Then I shall go," said Sam. "I won't stop; for I know you'll be plaguing my very life out."

"No, we won't, Sam, if you'll come and help us do our gardens up."

"Oh, ah!" said Sam, "and I've got no end of things as wants doing: there's all the wall fruit wants nailing in, and the grapes wants thinning, and— There now, just look at that! Master Harry, you mustn't. If you don't put it down directly, I'll go and fetch out the Maester."

Sam might well exclaim, for Harry was beginning to help him, and had seized the scythe. With cut number one he had shaved off the top of a fine verbena. With cut number two, he had driven the point of the sharp tool into the sod. Where the third cut would have gone, I can't say; for Sam, hobbling up to the young workman, the young workman frisked off, and seized the barrow half full of grass.

"Jump in, Fred!" he exclaimed; and of course Fred soon made himself a seat on the soft green contents, and then away went the barrow as fast as Harry could run, and of course right away from the place where Sam would require it next.

Poor old Sam! He loved his master's boys, and he loved to scold them too, as much as they loved to torment him; and in all their skirmishes—one of which always occurred whenever they came into his garden, as he called it—Sam always got the worst of it, and had to yield to numbers. And so in this case he saw that he should lose the day, and therefore he declared a truce, and called up Philip to act as mediator.

"Now, Master Phil, if you'll promise not to bother me any more, I'll put you all up to something."

"What is it?" said Philip.

"Ah, you fetch them tother ones here, and I'll show you."

Away darted Philip, and soon returned with Harry, the barrow, and Fred.

Old Sam made sure of the barrow by sitting down upon the edge, and would have been canted over by Harry, only he expected, and very naturally, that it would make the poor old man cross.

"Now, Sam, what is it?" said Harry. "Come, look sharp."

"Ah," said Sam, "I've a good mind not to tell you. You don't deserve it, you know."

"Oh, I don't care," said Harry, seizing the old man's broom, and darting off with it. "Come along, Phil, Fred, and we'll have such a game."

"Now, Master Harry," said Sam, appealingly. Then to himself, "I never did see sich a young dog in my life. Do come, please," he continued aloud.

"Well, what is it?" said Harry, advancing with the broom, held like a gun with fixed bayonet brought to the charge, and poking with the birch part at the old gardener.

"Well, you know, you promised to be quiet, you know, didn't you?"

"Why, of course we did," said Harry and Philip together. "Now, come, tell us what it is."

"Well," said Sam at last, "it's a wopses' nest as wants taking."

"Capital!" said Harry, throwing down the broom; "where is it?"

Old Sam's eyes twinkled with triumph as he got slowly up and led the way to his tool-shed, where he reached down the large fumigating bellows, and in the hollow made for the purpose he put in some hot cinders, which Harry fetched in a shovel from the kitchen, and then on them a lump of brimstone, and closed the nozzle over all; but not so quickly but that a puff or two of the penetrating fumes escaped, and made the boys' eyes water, and old Sam cough and choke most terribly for a minute or two.

"Now then," said Sam, wheezing away at a dreadful rate, "I'm not going with you, you know, so you take the bellows, Master Harry; and I should take some boughs, if I were you, and beat the wopses off if they gets loose. The nest is in the plantation, in the dead willow-tree that lies by the path; so now go on, and good luck to you."

The lads wanted no further incentive, but started off at full speed, to come back again directly to say that the brimstone wasn't burning. However, on giving two or three puffs with the bellows, Sam found this was not the case, for it was alight; so off they started, half wild with excitement, across the lawn, and old Sam rubbing his hands down the sides of his trousers to give vent to his intense feeling of satisfaction to think how well his device had succeeded; and then the old man returned to his work, chuckling away, and, I am sorry to add, muttering that he hoped they'd "some on 'em get stung;" an uncharitable wish, however, that had no fulfilment in the sequel.

"Come along, boys," said Harry, who was bellows-bearer; and away they scudded till they reached the wooden bridge over the ditch, and then they stood together beneath the trees.

Puff, puff. Yes, the brimstone was all right, and now for the wasps.

"Let me do it," said Philip, catching at the bellows.

"No, no; I'll do it," said Harry, putting them behind his back.

"Now, Harry, you know I'm older than you, and you carried them here, so you ought to give way," said Philip.

"Why," said Harry, "we ought neither of us to do it, because Cousin Fred's here, and he's a visitor. Here, Fred," he said, holding out the bellows, "you do it."

"Do what?" said Fred, staring. "I don't know what you are going to do."

"Why, take the wasps' nest in that old touchwood tree. You're only got to put the nose of the bellows into the hole where they are going in and out, and blew, and then keep them tight there till all the wasps are dead."

Fred looked at the bellows, then at his cousins, then at the hole in the fallen trunk where the wasps were flying about; and after giving a puff with the bellows, when smoke issued from the nozzle, he slowly approached the hole, and stooped over it to insert the death-dealing instrument.

"Buzz—booz—whooz—ooz—ooz—ooz," said a couple of wasps, coming home in a hurry, and circling round Fred's head so very closely that the boy shut his eyes, and, stooping down very low, backed away crab fashion as fast as ever he could.

"I shan't do it," said Fred, rather red in the face; "they'll sting."

"No, they won't," said Harry; "I'll go," and catching up the bellows, he walked boldly up towards the hole.

"I say," he said, "you two get boughs, and if the wasps do come out you can beat them down."

There was a minute of intense interest, during which Harry crept close up to the hole, and Philip and Fred, armed with lime-tree boughs, stood as body guard to protect the assaulting party.

Nearer and nearer went Harry, and then pushed the nozzle right in up to the part holding the brimstone, and puffed away as hard as he could.

"Whir—whooz—whooz—booz—wooz—buzz—wooz—burr—urr-r-r-r—whir-r-r-r," said the wasps, scuffling out past the nozzle by the dozen; and one, which must have been the leader, made a lodgment in Harry's hair.

Down went the bellows, and away went the boys as hard as ever they could run out of the plantation, and over the wooden bridge, till they were safe from the infuriated wasps, whose loud hum they could hear even after they were some distance off.

"Here," said Harry, "knock this beggar out of my head; make haste, or he'll sting me." For there, buzzing and struggling in the boy's curls, was one of the wasps, which was killed by Fred, who squeezed it between two pieces of stick, and placed it beyond the power of doing mischief.

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Philip, when there was no more danger: and when he had got his breath again, "What a game!"

"Booh," said Harry; "was it? You wouldn't like to go and try again."

"I wouldn't mind," said Philip; "I shouldn't run faster than you did."

"Ah! never mind," said Harry; "you run fast enough this time. I only wish," he continued sulkily, "that I had let you go."

Now, Philip was generally most terribly teased by his brother, and therefore it was not surprising that he, who was generally such a mild and inoffensive lad, should take this opportunity of making a little retaliation. But one thing was very

certain, and that was, that he would have backed out of the task even if Harry had given it up to him.

"Can't we fetch the bellows?" said Harry. "Let's go and see."

Off they went again, but at a slower pace this time, in case there should be any of the fierce little insects waiting for them. But their caution was needless, for the wasps were busy at work trying to stick their stings into the bellows, and some of them losing their lives through the vapour that came reeking out of the opening. But when the lads got near enough to see what a cloud there was buzzing about, they gave up all idea of getting the bellows till night, and took vengeance for their defeat by getting a little farther off and pelting the tree, but only hitting it about once in twenty times, so that they very soon tired of that pastime, and went back to see what poor old Sam could find for them fresh.

"Now, then," said Sam, when they came up, "where's the wopses' nest? The Squire wants some grabs for fishing."

"Ain't got it," said Harry, shortly.

"How's that?" said the old man; "you weren't afeard, was you?"

"No," said Harry, stoutly; "I wasn't afraid, only they came buzzing out so we were obliged to give in."

Chuckle, chuckle, went the old man at their defeat; but he would not go himself to fetch the bellows, although he laughed at the boys' expense.

"You'd better leave off laughing," said Philip, taking Harry's part, "or we'll stop here all the morning."

Sam grew serious in a moment, for the boy couldn't have uttered a more dire threat against his peace of mind.

"Ah! I ain't laughing, Master Phil, only it is good fun to see the wopses make any one run. If I was you, I should go and have a look at Bramble Dyke; they say as the water's nearly all dried up, and you can get fish out of it."

"It's too far," said Philip, "because we are going out with Papa directly after dinner."

Sam was done for a moment; but a bright thought flashed across his brain. "Ah," said he, "if I was a young gentleman, I should go down the north planting hedge, close to the dung-heaps; they do say there is a sight of snakes there; but in course you young gentlemen won't go, for as you're afraid of wopses, in course you won't like to go where there's snakes."

"Who's afraid?" said Harry; "I'm not; come on, boys," and away they scampered again on their new expedition; while Sam leaned upon his broom with which he was brushing the velvet green lawn, and chuckled again at the success of his ruse.

The boys armed themselves with stout sticks, and let Dick loose to take with them; and then away down by the big fence to the north planting Dick industriously hunting along the hedges and ditches as they went.

"Keep back, Dick!" said Harry, when they reached the manure heaps; "keep back, sir; quiet; down, dog, down!"

But Dick was not a well-trained dog at all. He did not often come out, and when he did he seemed to make the most of it; so every command given by his master Dick answered by a leap, a scamper, and a bark, and doing everything but what he was told.

"Catch hold of him, Phil; he'll frighten all the snakes away before we see them."

But Dick would not be caught hold of, but capered about just out of reach, and lolled his tongue out as though in derision of the efforts made to secure him, till, growing more bold and impudent, he kept making charges at his young masters' legs, until by one quick snatch Philip caught the rascal by one of his ears, and so secured him in a most ignoble manner, dragging him along with his skin all drawn on one side, his eyes out of place, and his mouth wearing a most serio-comical expression.

Poor Dick! he did not mean any harm; but as to being a trained and obedient dog, he was, as I said before, nothing of the kind, and often spoiled a great deal of sport by his wild harum-scarum ways. But now, as he was secured, a handkerchief was tied tightly round his neck, and another to that by way of a chain or slip, and then the search was prosecuted.

The manure heaps were very long and large, and lay on a piece of waste ground beside the park palings, and it was through the rents and gaps in these pales that the snakes came out of the plantation to lay their eggs in the warm manure; and, of course, if Master Dick had been left alone, he would have run barking and scratching all along and alarmed the game. As it was, they went the whole length of the first heap without hearing so much as a rustle. The second heap was nearly passed in the same way, when Harry, who was first, stepped nimbly back and caught hold of the handkerchief that held Dick, who, seeing that something exciting was going on, immediately became rampant, but was soon guided to a spot where a snake had nearly buried itself in the rotten straw, and lay with about nine inches of its tail exposed, after the fashion of an ostrich, which supposes that if its head is hidden it must be all right and safe. But there was no safety for the poor snake, for Dick was down upon him in a moment and hanging on to its tail, in spite of the struggles of the poor thing to get away.

All Dick's efforts were directed towards dragging the snake out of its hole, while the snake, by means of its scaly and plated body, offered a most powerful resistance, and tried hard to creep farther in; and so they went on for some time, the snake, however, gradually losing ground, until the lads began to dig round it with their sticks, and loosen the manure, when out it came all at once, writhing and twining, and trying to fasten upon Dick's head; but the dog's shaggy, wiry hair protected him, and shaking the unco' brute off for a moment, he got another gripe at it close up to the head, and shook it, and worried it, until the poor snake hardly moved, but gave in, conquered and dying.

The trophy was secured, and Dick's stumpy tail wag-waggled, as much as to say, "Didn't I do that well?" and then he kept snapping and leaping up at the handkerchief which held the snake, while his red tongue quivered and stuck out between his sharp shiny teeth that were longing to have another snap at something. The huntsmen then cautiously went along the side of the two remaining heaps, but not another trace of a snake could they find, so they went back the whole length of the four heaps, but with no better success, till Dick, who was down at the bottom of the bramble-covered ditch, suddenly set up a sharp, short bark, then there was a rustle and skurry for a moment, and he rushed open-mouthed up the bank head fust at the oak palings, and came against them with a thud just after a snake's tail was seen to disappear through a hole at the bottom, where a small piece had rotted away.

Dick whined and howled with rage at being thus stopped in his career, and seizing a piece of the broken pale in his teeth, dragged it so that he would shortly have made himself a way through, but his young masters were soon by his side.

"Throw him over, Harry," said Philip, excitedly, and in a moment Harry had the struggling dog in his arms, raising him till he got his feet on the top of the palings, when he leaped lightly down on the other side, and began hunting about through the fallen leaves and twigs for the escaped quarry; but all in vain, as his whining testified, so that poor Dick was called off, and had to run nearly a quarter of a mile before he could find a place to creep through, which he did at last by scraping a little of the earth from beneath the pales, and then grovelling through, getting stuck about the middle of his back, though, and whining till he got free, which he did after two or three struggles, and then ran to join his young masters, who were whistling and calling him as loudly as they could, and who now turned their steps homeward, for Harry declared he could smell the roast beef they were going to have for dinner.

Chapter 12

A Flight with the Flies.

I DON'T suppose Harry could smell the roast beef when he was a mile from home, but sure enough it was done when the boys got there, and they had only just time to get themselves ready before the dinner-bell rang.

"Well, boys, I suppose you have been very quiet," said Mr Inglis, "and are ready for a good long walk this afternoon?"

"We're ready for the walk, Papa, but we haven't been very quiet," said Philip. "One don't seem as if one could keep very quiet this fine weather. I never do. I should like to be always out."

"I shouldn't," said Harry, with his mouth full of beef and potato; "I should like to come in when dinner and tea were ready."

"Well said, Harry!" exclaimed Mr Inglis; "that was certainly not a very polite speech, but there was a good deal of common sense in it; and I don't think Master Phil, there, would care much about stopping out when it rained. But make haste, boys; we must not stop talking, for there are all the things to get ready, and we have a long walk before us."

Half an hour after, Mr Inglis and the boys were passing out of the gate, and they soon reached the spot where the lads entered the wood the day they were lost; but this time they kept along the fields by the side; and beautiful those fields looked, and beautiful, too, the wood-side. There were wood anemones and hyacinths by the thousand, spangling the bright green grass here with delicate white, and there with the dark blue bells; while the brionies and honeysuckle clustered in every direction along the dwarf bushes by the side of the wood.

"There he goes," said Harry, all at once starting off full speed after a sulphur butterfly.

“Stop, stop!” cried Mr Inglis. “Here, Philip, take the net, and go steadily and quietly and see if you cannot catch it, but you must not hurry, or you will send it right away.”

Philip took the green clap-net and went in chase of the beautiful fly which flitted on before him, now stopping, now going on again, and sipping flower after flower. At last he got close enough, and stooping as far forward as he could reach, popped the green gauze net down upon the grass.

The other boys ran breathlessly up, while Mr Inglis drew from his pocket a large-sized pill-box and a pair of forceps, and on coming up to the spot where Philip and the other boys were, he stooped down to secure the prize.

“Well, where is it?” said Mr Inglis.

“Just underneath,” said Philip.

“I don’t think it is,” said Mr Inglis, looking down at the net.

“Oh yes, it is,” said Philip; “I’m sure I caught it.”

So Mr Inglis looked through the net in all directions, but not a sign could he see of any sulphur butterfly, for Philip had popped the net down just behind it, and the bright-coloured fly was off and away far enough by that time.

“Never mind; try again,” said Mr Inglis, “only don’t be so impetuous; go quietly after the butterfly till you get within reach, and then press the net down firmly and quickly, or close it over the prize. If you go so impetuously you agitate the air, and drive a volume of it before you, which not only alarms the insect, but helps to force it out of your reach.”

“But I was sure I had it,” said Philip.

“Just so,” said Mr Inglis, smiling; “but it does not do to be too sure of anything. Now, Philip,” he continued, “take the net again, and see if you cannot have a little better success; there’s one of the little blue butterflies hovering over that dry bank—there, where we picked the harebells last year. Don’t you see it?—it almost looks like a harebell itself.”

“Oh! I see it now,” said Philip, seizing the net and rushing off.

“Not so fast—not so fast,” cried Mr Inglis; but it was of no use, for Philip darted up to the bank, and as he did so the little blue butterfly gently rose in the air, and disappeared over the hedge into the next field.

“Here, Fred,” said Mr Inglis, handing his nephew a small bag net fitted to a joint of a fishing-rod; “now try what you can do, and see if you cannot creep up quietly without all that rush and fuss your cousins make. Now, then, there goes another sulphur butterfly.”

Fred started off, and followed the insect all along one side of the field by the wood, and then partly along the other, when the game gently rose and went over to the other side. But there was a gap in the hedge, and Fred crept through; but on reaching the other side no butterfly could he see for a minute, when all at once it rose from a flower close beside him, and began flitting down the hedge-side again. At last it alighted upon a bunch of Mayflower, quite low down, a late cluster that ought to have been out in bloom a month earlier; and now Fred crept up closer and closer till he stood within reach, when he dashed the net down and just missed the insect, which began to rise, when, recovering his net, Fred made another flying dash, and to his great delight he saw that the yellow treasure was fluttering about inside.

Just then his uncle and the boys came through the gap, and the butterfly, which Mr Inglis said was a very fine specimen, was secured and placed in one of the large pill-boxes.

The captures now made became frequent: at one time it was a gorgeous peacock admiral, with the splendid eyes upon its wings; then one of the pretty tortoiseshell butterflies, or a red admiral, with its lovely lace-edged wings; then again, one of the curious dusky-veined, or an orange-tipped, with its under wings so beautifully traced with green. Down by the pond side, too, they captured some of the fierce libellulae, the gauzy-winged dragon-flies, that darted about with such a powerful flight over the water, and then hovered apparently motionless, as though looking at their beautiful bodies reflected on the bright surface. On one bank, too, a bright little green lizard was captured, and carefully secured, to place in one of the fern cases; besides which there were rose beetles, watchmen, spiders, and tiny flies, that Fred considered were neither curious nor pretty, but which Mr Inglis said were quite the contrary, being both curious and pretty, or, rather, beautiful, as he would show Master Fred when they reached home. There were plenty of specimens, too, to have been obtained from the water; but this was not a water expedition, so they contented themselves with the productions of the air, and rich indeed was this part of the country in insect wonders. Fred at first only looked upon the gaily-painted butterflies, and bright rose beetles, as being beautiful, till he heard some of the explanations from Mr Inglis, when he found that in some of the smallest insects they captured there were ten times the beauties and wonders that were to be found in their larger companions. There were numberless things that he would have passed over because they were not striking at the first glance, but which the eye of the naturalist had sought out, and made known to those who had not chosen insect life for their study. Fred never before saw such plumes of feathers as some little gnats wore on their heads, nor knew of such a wondrous or dangerous instrument as the sting of a bee, so fine and so sharp; and yet fine as it was, able to contain a channel by which the minute portion of poison was injected into the tiny wound to rankle and create such great pain.

“But come,” said Mr Inglis, “we must talk about these things when we get back to-night, and have the microscope out. We must have some more specimens yet. Try after those great cabbage butterflies, boys’—those we have are getting very shabby in appearance.”

Away started Harry and Philip, forgetting in a moment all the advice they had received, and dashing off after the inserts in a wild chase, that ended, of course, in the butterflies soaring up out of reach, and the boys coming back hot and out of breath to be laughed at by their father and Fred.

At last they reached Mr Benson’s farm, where they were most cordially received by the farmer’s happy-faced dame, who seemed delighted to see her belated friends again, and soon had them into the house to feast upon fresh-gathered strawberries and some of the thick yellow cream that she skimmed morning and night from the pans in her snowy dairy; and when they had finished, and Mr Inglis was having a quiet chat with Farmer Benson about crops, and markets, and similar matters, which Harry classed together as “all bother,” Mrs Benson showed the boys her famous dairy, which I was quite right in calling “snowy,” for it was in everything of the whitest and coldest. For Mrs Benson’s dairy was famous for the

butter and cream it produced, and was well known at all the markets round, for from nowhere else was there such sweet golden-looking butter to be obtained.

After Fred had been initiated in the mysteries of churning and cheese pressing, they all went into the orchard, and saw what a goodly promise of apples there was, and then and there Mrs Benson promised them a basketful, which she said she would send to them at the school. Then into the garden, which seemed to be overflowing with fruit and vegetables; and then into the farm-yard to see the fowls, cows, and calves, and have a peep in at the great brindle bull, whose low thundering bellow made the door vibrate and rattle upon its hinges, and who turned round his great heavy, stupid-looking face to the full length of his bright chain, and stared at his visitors as much as to say, "Did you ever see such a great bull-headed thing before in all your life?" He seemed to be anything but the great savage, roaring beast that Fred had expected to see. But for all his dull look, this very bull could fly into a passion sometimes when he was out in the fields, and stamp and bellow and tear up the ground, making the sods fly in all directions. He once charged at the cowman who was going to drive the cows all up for milking, and as soon as the man saw him coming away he ran for the gate, and after him came the bull, full tear. The more the cowman ran the more the bull ran, till at last the gate was reached, and over it went the poor fellow, in a half jump, half tumble sort of fashion, and then away again on the other side; while the bull, evidently considering the gate as unworthy of his notice, disdained to try and leap, but went rush at it like a small railway train at a crossing where the gates have been accidentally left open.

"Crash" went the gate, and "Bellow" went the bull, for it really hurt him, as was testified by one of his horns being broken short off, making the poor beast stop short, and stamp and bellow louder than ever; and, giving up all thought of chasing the cowman, run tearing round the field in a great clumsy gallop, frightening the cows till they all did the same, with tails sticking straight up, and having plenty of difficulty to get out of the poor bull's way, I say "poor" bull, for the animal must have been suffering intense pain, though he deserved very little pity, for there is no knowing what might have been the cowman's fate if it had not been for the gate.

When the visitors stood looking at the great staring-eyed, one-horned beast, the place was quite well, and but for the one-sided appearance given to him by the ragged stump having been sawn short off, there was no trace of the feat he had performed in rushing at the gate.

There was so much to see at the farm that Mr Inglis had a hard matter to get away; besides which, the farmer and his dame were very anxious that they should all stay to tea, and the lads had not the slightest objection; but Mr Inglis said, when they came out for a specified purpose they ought no to turn aside from it, and now; as they had paid their visit to the farm, as previously arranged, they ought to return to their collecting, for the moths would now be coming out fast.

At last they were off, and this time took their way across the meadows by the river side, so as to get to the wood again a couple of miles nearer home, Mr Inglis considering that several pleasing objects of natural history might here be collected.

They had not gone far before he called the attention of the boys to the Ephemene or Mayflies dancing up and down in their beautiful light over the banks

of the stream. Beautiful little objects they seemed, with their spotted wings and three tails, as straight up they flew rapidly for five or six feet, and then, spreading out wings and tails, allowed themselves, without effort, but with evenly balanced bodies, to sink down again, presenting a beautiful appearance as the fast descending sun shone sideways upon them.

Fred could have stopped for half an hour watching these Mayflies, but time was flying as well, and they had to get home to tea; but two or three fine specimens were captured by Mr Inglis and put safely in as many pill-boxes, and during their stay as many more were snapped up by the fish in the river. Then on the party went again towards the wood, capturing insect treasures as they passed through the pleasant green meadows and by hedge-rows, all now of a bright golden green with the rays of the sinking sun. Now it was a great stag-beetle that was caught—a great horny-headed and horny-bodied fellow, so strong that he could force his way out of a closed hand by sheer pushing, like his friend the cockchafer, who now began to whirr and drone about under the shady boughs of the trees, but who would not come near enough to be captured, till at last one of them came bump up against Mr Inglis's hat, in its headlong flight, when Fred picked it out of the grass where it had fallen, and was astonished at the slow but strenuous efforts the insect made to escape.

As they came up to the wood Fred stopped short, for from out of its dark recesses came a peculiar whirring sound, as if somebody was busy with a spinning-wheel.

"Chur–r–r–r–r–r–r–r–r," went the noise, rising and falling, now farther off, now nearer, and all the time kept up with the greatest regularity.

"Whatever is that?" said Fred to his cousins.

"Oh!" said Harry, laughing, "that's old Dame Durden spinning her yarn."

"What?" said Fred incredulously.

"There, look," said Mr Inglis, for the noise had stopped. "There goes Harry's Dame Durden;" and just then there came swooping out of the wood with noiseless flight, a large brown bird, which then went skimming along by the wood-side and back to where there stood a noble beech with wide-spreading boughs, beneath whose shade the bird went circling round with a beautifully easy flight, sometimes keeping quite in the shade, and every now and then rising higher up the tree; but still skimming along almost like a swallow, "There," said Mr Inglis again, when they had watched the bird for some minutes, "that is the way to turn entomologist; see how easily that bird captures the moths that flit round the tree. If we could only secure specimens like that, what rare ones we should get sometimes of those that always fly high out of our reach! There, did you see him catch that moth, high up above the big bough? With what a graceful curve he turned upon the wing, caught it, and then dipped downward. See, he must have got a mouthful, and has gone off to the wood again, where perhaps he has nestlings."

"Well, but," said Fred, "that can't be a swallow, it is so big, and I thought swallows were the only birds that caught flies and moths upon the wing."

"No," said Mr Inglis, "it is not a swallow, though it has similar habits, and always catches its prey upon the wing. It is a bird that bears a good many different names; one of the most appropriate is that of the 'night-jar,'—though it is not really a night bird, but more of the twilight. It is called 'jar,' from the peculiar

jarring noise which you heard, just like that made by the vibrating of a spinning-wheel. In some places they call it the 'goatsucker,' from a foolish idea that it sucked the milk from the goats, as it is sometimes seen to fly close down to them, and, between the legs of various animals, to capture the flies that infest them in the soft, tender parts of their bodies. A glance at the bird's great gaping mouth should be sufficient to convince anybody that it was meant for nothing else but catching flies, and the spiny fringe of hair at the side for caging them there when caught. In some places it is called the 'night-hawk,' and I should scarcely think there is any bird that has more names than our friend there."

A few more moths and insects were captured, among which was a very fine puss moth, whose downy appearance made it a great object of attraction to the boys, as was also one of those noble-looking insects, the privet hawk moth, which was also captured, with gold-tails, tigers, etc, etc; and at last, regularly tired out, the lads walked quietly along by the side of Mr Inglis, listening to the mellow evening notes of the cuckoo, the distant lowing of the cows, and the occasional "tink, tink" of a sheep bell; while skimming along the surface of the fields, the never-tired swallows kept sweeping away the flies front out of their path. With the setting sun, however, the last swallow disappeared; and one by one in the pearly-grey sky appeared the stars; and then, loud, sweet, and clear, from out the grove came the notes of the nightingales, ringing away through the distance, till bird answered bird, and the song seemed almost continuous, cheering the party till they finished their walk.

Mr Inglis had been highly amused with Harry's humorous description of how they had attacked the citadel of the wasps. And how ignominiously they had been put to flight; and told them how foolish their plan was, for they might have been sure that a large number of the insects would be out, seeking for food; and, as they would be constantly returning, they would be certain to attack those whom they found interfering with their castle; for soldiers as they were among insects, and armed too with such a powerful weapon, the attack was nothing more than the boys might have expected. However, he promised the lads that he would assist them the next evening, and detailed his plan of attack, giving them a long description of the way he should proceed, for he saw that they could hardly get along; but his account so took up their attention, that just in the midst of one of his remarks they reached the gates, and he exclaimed:—"Now, boys, enough entomology for one day; for, like you, I'm tired out; so let's see what Mamma there, who is waiting at the door, has in store for us."

Chapter 13

Ratting with Dick—The End of the Wopses.

THE EVENING after the entomological ramble passed away very quietly, for the boys were too tired to care for anything but the hearty tea they made, which partook more of the nature of a supper; and after this there was such a disposition for sleep exhibited by the whole of the party, not excluding the Squire himself, that

Mrs Inglis very soon began to talk about bed; and toe had to talk very loudly, too, for Harry had curled himself up in the great easy chair, dormouse fashion; Fred was sitting at the table with a book, whose leaves he was keeping from flying open by resting his head upon them; while Philip was seated on a small ottoman by his father's knees, and resting against them, fast asleep, as was also the Squire himself.

Mrs Inglis looked up from the fancy work upon which she was engaged, and could not help smiling at the appearance the rest of the inmates of the room presented. However, judging that at all events the junior portion would be far better in bed, she proceeded to arouse them, which was no easy task; and at last got them out of the room, Harry being by far the most sleepy, and yawning fearfully as he was led off to bed.

The next morning Fred was the first awake, and, after rousing his cousins, he went to the window to raise the blind, when he found it to be a regular soaking wet morning, one with a heavy, leaden-hued sky, and the rain coming down "plish-plash" from the leaves and branches, and upon the edges of the verandah the drops running together like glassy beads until too heavy to hang, when they dropped upon the stones below, just in the same places where they had fallen for years, and wore the stone away into hollows. Little streams were slowly running down by the sides of the gravel-walks, and every bit of path looked muddy and dirty. As for the birds, they did not seem to mind the rain a bit, but were hurrying about the grounds picking up the worms, slugs, and snails that the cooling rain had fetched out of their hiding-places, so that they were having a regular feast; while one thrush, who had evidently been an early bird, and had the first pick at the worms, was up, high up, in the cedar at the corner of the field, whistling away as though the happiest of birds. The roses were getting washed clear of the blight that had begun to cover them; and everything seemed to be drinking in the soft cooling drops that fell so gently and bathed the face of nature, for during Fred's visit the only rain that had fallen was that which accompanied the thunderstorm, and since then the hot sun had drawn all the moisture from the surface, so that many things began to appear parched, and to flag in the noontide heat. Altogether it was a regular soaking morning; and, after being very tired overnight, when people get up on these very wet soaky mornings they are liable to get low-spirited, and to feel dull—there is a want of elasticity in the air, and the consequence is that folks feel yawny, or gapish, whichever is the best word; and after looking out at the gloomy prospect—for places will look rather gloomy in these heavy rains, which are very different things to the soft, passing showers which lay the parched dust, and when the sun shines forth brighter than ever soon after, and makes the pearly drops glitter and sparkle where they hang to spray or leaf—I say, after looking out at the gloomy prospect, people often turn round and look at their bed, and the nice comfortably-shaped impression they left there; and I have known people so weak as to get into bed again and go to sleep; and amongst those weak enough to get into bed was Fred; but he would have required to have been strong enough to go to sleep, for, directly after, Harry and Philip charged into the room nearly dressed; and seeing what Fred had been doing, they seized the clothes, whisked them off, and then pretended to smother the poor idler with his own pillow.

“Now ain’t that sneaky, Phil, to call two fellows up and then go and crawl into bed again? Fetch the sponge.”

But Fred did not wait for the sponge, for he began to shuffle into his clothes as hard as ever he could.

“Well, look what a miserable, cold, wet morning it is,” said the sluggard.

Harry ran to the window and looked out, and then made a grimace at the weather. “Oh,” said he, “what a bother; and we were going up the Camp Hill botanising.”

“No, we weren’t,” said Philip; “Papa said we should not go till Monday.”

“Good job, too,” said Harry; “but never mind, we’ll find something to do, see if we don’t. Oh! I know; Papa promised to bring out the microscope last sight and show us the insects, only we all went to sleep. I was so jolly tired.”

“You weren’t so tired as I was,” said Philip.

“Yes, I was,” said Harry, “ever so much more.”

“I know you weren’t,” said Philip.

“How do you know that?” said Harry.

“How do you know that you were?” said Philip.

“Because I felt so,” said Harry.

“Well, so did I,” said Philip.

“Oh! bother,” said Harry, finding no bottom to the argument. “I know who was most tired; it was Fred, for he went to sleep first with a bit of bread and butter in his mouth.”

“I didn’t,” said Fred, indignantly.

“That you did; didn’t he, Philip? and Pa and Ma both laughed at him; and I wasn’t so sleepy but that I saw Pa get Kirby and Spence’s ‘Tomology’ down to read, and lean back in his chair himself—now then!”

During this dispute no progress was made in the dressing; but, upon Harry suggesting that they should go and peep at the specimens they obtained on the previous evening, they all scrambled through the rest of their dressing, and hurried down to the Study, where all the boxes had been placed overnight.

Harry finished dressing first, and would have run down stairs, but was prevented by Philip, who locked the door, and then passed the key to Fred, so that Master Harry was compelled to wait until the others were ready. At last they descended by sliding down the banisters, Philip leading off, and Harry nearly upsetting him at the bottom by sliding down too quickly and coming into sharp contact. At last they burst, pell-mell, into the study, as if they were soldiers about to sack a town, and perhaps, too, a little more impetuously.

“Gently, gently,” said Mr Inglis, who was sitting there reading; “what’s the matter?”

“Oh! Papa, we did not know you were here; we came to look at the specimens,” said Philip.

But the specimens were not to be touched till the afternoon, for Mr Inglis was going over to the town. But he promised that the microscope should be brought out in the evening, and then sent the boys into the breakfast parlour, where they found Mrs Inglis making the tea.

Breakfast being finished, Mr Inglis started off through the miserable, wet, drenching morning, and the boys were left to amuse themselves as best they

could, which they did by getting ready their fishing-tackle for the promised trip to Lord Copsedale's lake, which had been almost forgotten, so many amusements had been awaiting them day after day; but which it was now decided by Harry should take place on the following Tuesday morning.

To the great delight of all, about twelve o'clock the clouds began to break, and the sun to peep out, so that by the time Mr Inglis returned it was quite a fine afternoon, and he promised that he would go with them in the evening to destroy the wasps' nest, while the afternoon being so fine left them at liberty to have a run and amuse themselves with out-door sports,—always remembering, that the microscope was to be brought out in the evening, the taking of the wasps' nest being only looked upon as a small portion of what was to be done.

Mr Inglis got very little assistance over the arrangement of his specimens, for the excitement of catching them being past, Harry and Philip cared very little for the more delicate operations of pinning out and arranging, which required great care and nicety—the tender wings of a butterfly showing every rude touch and finger-mark in the despoiled feathers or plumes with which its pinions are adorned.

Mr Inglis was sitting in his study very busily engaged in this manner, and surrounded with entomological pins, when he saw the boys dash by the window in company with Dick to hunt for water-rats by the river side.

Dick had be willing enough to go, for weather seemed no object to him—hail, rain, or sunshine, he was always ready for a hunt, race, or anything, and, by his actions, showed that he would far rather run after nothing at all than be tied-up by his kennel; this tying up being a task not easy to perform unless he was tired out, for Dick used to be seized with deaf fits upon these occasions, and would scamper off in some other direction, and at last have to be hunted out and ignominiously dragged to his chain, most likely by one ear, as we have seen when he was out after the snakes; for a lover of liberty was Dick, one who abhorred chains as fully as any negro dragged from the burning coast of Africa; but the poor fellow was compelled to wear the chain for long hours every day, and therefore his reluctance to return to his collar when, once he was free of it. But upon this afternoon the dog was in full enjoyment of his liberty, and off to the river side, as I have said before, to have a rat hunt.

It was a capital hunt the boys had that afternoon, although nothing was captured; still Dick almost had hold of one great wet fellow by the tail, which he just managed to save by dashing into his hole as the dog came up to it, and stood barking and snapping his teeth because he was so disappointed. There was no end of rat holes in the bank overhanging the river, but it appeared as though the little animals had an instinctive aversion to making the acquaintance of a dog, for snug enough they kept themselves in the above-named holes, and, as it appeared after a couple of hours' search that no rats were to be obtained, the lads slowly sauntered back to the Grange in rather a disappointed frame of mind. But the boys consoled themselves with the idea that there was to be some good fun in the evening, when the wasps' nest would be taken; and at last, without any further adventure than that of Dick hunting somebody's ducklings through the horse-pond, and having to be pelted with large pebbles to keep him from catching one of them—greatly to the disgust of the owner, who would have been in a great

passion, only he knew to whom the dog belonged, and also knew that if any mischief befel the ducklings he would be well recompensed for his loss. However, Dick was persuaded to leave the pond at last, and, after making a sort of canine fountain of himself as he shook the water out of his coat, he consented to walk quietly home behind his young masters, and was safely chained up by his kennel, to doze away the time, with the raven for company, until the next run he could obtain with the boys.

As soon as tea was over, Mr Inglis made preparations for taking the wasps' nest, by making Harry take a spade and dig out a piece of stiff yellow clay from down by the little gravel pit; and then, after he had well-kneaded the mass, the fumigating bellows were once more obtained, plenty of hot cinders placed inside, and upon them a small quantity of flour of brimstone; after which the garden was crossed, the plantation reached, and the fallen tree reconnoitred.

The sun was just setting, and the busy day hum of the wasps hushed to a faint, low murmur, while not a single insect could be seen either going in or out of the hole. Mr Inglis then made Harry apply the mass of clay to the nozzle of the bellows, and fix it tightly round them, so that when the instrument was applied to the hole the clay could be pushed close up, and every cranny closed by the plastic mass, so that nothing but the deadly vapour would go in.

At last all was ready, and the first puff was given by Philip, for he was operating under the direction of his father. At that first puff of the bellows the faint hum within the fallen tree increased to almost a roar, as the infuriated little insects vainly rushed about to gain an exit from the suffocating prison in which they were closely confined. Upon hearing the noise Philip almost dropped the bellows, but, at a word from his father, he kept on steadily—puff—puff—puff, till the noise within the tree grew fainter and fainter, and at last entirely ceased; and then they knew that the fatal work was done then the bellows were withdrawn, the hole carefully closed up with clay, and the tree left as it was till the Monday morning, when Sam was to get some wedges and a beetle and split it open, so as to obtain the nest without damage, if possible. Harry was for having the tree split at once, but Mr Inglis was of opinion that it had better be left as it was for the time, and led the way towards the house.

As soon as they were all seated in the dining-room, Mr Inglis brought out the large mahogany box containing the microscope, with the different specimens which he had prepared for inspection, and Fred was soon astonished with the wonder which he saw, such as flies' eyes, displaying within themselves innumerable other tiny eyes, each evidently possessing its own powers of vision. Then there was down off a butterfly's wing; the wings of flies; the wing-cases of beetles, displaying colours of the most gorgeous hues, and glittering like precious stones; tiny insects, such as seen creeping upon the opening buds of roses: and all these, with numberless other things, were displayed to the astonished boy's gaze. Most of these had been seen by Harry and Philip many times before, so that Fred had a very long inspection of the microscopical wonders, and was greatly puzzled to understand how many hundreds of times any little object could be magnified; and, on afterwards looking beside the microscope at the speck upon the glass plate, which, when he looked through the instrument, had appeared to be of the most gorgeous tints, he could scarcely believe that both objects were the same;

and he kept taking his eye from the instrument to look down the side, and then, with a wondering air, back again.

And so the evening quickly passed away, for Mr Inglis had a large collection of objects for the microscope, and, what was more, a genial way of chatting about them, imparting plenty of useful knowledge at the same time, but in so interesting a manner that the boys were never-tired of listening, and would hardly believe it when they heard at last it was bed-time.

Chapter 14

Sunday in the Country.

THE NEXT day being Sunday, the boys walked over to church with Mr and Mrs Inglis—to the pretty old church that looked as if it was built of ivy, so thoroughly were tower, nave, and chancel covered with the dark green leaves, which had to be kept cut back or they would have soon covered up the windows; and even then, long green shoots were dangling about in all directions, ready to take advantage of a week or two's neglect, and commence veiling the old stone mullioned windows.

This was Fred's first visit to the church, for on the first Sundays of his stay the days had been lowering, and Mr Inglis read prayers in the dining-room; and now that the lad followed his cousins out of the bright sunshine, through the old porch, and into the dim venerable-looking building, everything struck him as being so very different from what he had been accustomed to see in London. Here there were the bare whitewashed walls, with the old tablets upon them, and here and there an old rusty helmet, or a breastplate and a pair of gauntlets. Then there were the quaint old brasses of a knight or squire and his wife, with a step-like row of children by their side, and all let in the old blue slabs that paved the floor, ever which the worshippers of succeeding generations had passed for hundreds of years since. Then, too, there was the recumbent figure of the Knight Templar lying cross-legged, with his feet resting upon a dog, or some curious heraldic beast, and carved to represent his having worn chain, armour; the old oak pulpit; the fragments of stained glass in the windows; and, above all, the quaint appearance of many of the country people, dressed as they were in their Sunday best. These were among the things that took Fred's especial attention when he first entered the old village church; but when, instead of an organ, the choir commenced singing to the accompaniment of an old clarionet, a bassoon, and bass viol, Fred was completely astonished, for he had never been in a church before where there was not an imposing-looking instrument, with its large rows of gilt pipes. However, the hymn, in spite of the bad accompaniment, was very sweetly sung, and the service beautifully read in the soft silence of that old, old church, with the thousand scents of the country floating in through the open doors and windows, like Nature's own incense entering the temple of Nature's God.

Fred sat and listened, and by degrees all that was quaint and odd seemed to fade away, and leave nothing but the solemn stillness of the place, with the calm

impressive voice of the clergyman telling of the goodness and love of his Maker. Then, too, the quiet walk back, with the breeze gently waving the corn now in full ear, making shade after shade of green appear to sweep over the surface of the many acres of rank wheat. The river, too, seemed to sparkle clearer and brighter than ever as the bright sun's rays flashed from the little Tipples. Altogether, Fred could not help, boy as he was, contrasting the bright country air and the lovely landscape with the fashionable London church in fashionable London: the hot dusty pavement—the noisy street and the oppressive choky air; and then he thought how he would like to live at Hollowdell for ever.

Boys are very quick in making their determinations, and Fred thought he was quite right in his; but he had never been down there in the winter, when the clay stuck to the boots, and the leaves had forsaken the trees; when the cold soaking rain came drenching down for day after day, and ofttimes the swollen river would be flooding the meadows. Fred had never realised the country in those times, when it was in such a state that by preference those who could stayed as much indoors as possible; but no one, to have looked at the present aspect of things, could have supposed such a change possible. Sunday in the country, in the long bright days of summer, truly is delightful, for it is only then that the young fully realise the calmness and beauty, for the cessation from sports leaves the young minds time to think a little more upon what is around them.

But I find that I am getting into too serious a strain, and my young readers will be for skipping all this portion of my story; so I must hasten to say that the calm summer evening was spent in a delightful walk down by the pleasant wood-side, where out of their reach the party could see, as it grew later, the light mists begin to curl above the river in many a graceful fold. Fred's friend, the night-jar, was out, and the nightingale in full call, while every now and then his sweet song was interrupted by the harsh "Tu—whoo—hoo—hoo—oo," of an owl somewhere in the recesses of the wood. Then the return home was made, and soon after the lads were asleep and dreaming of their botanical trip to the Camp Hill.

Chapter 15

Stalking on Stilts.

"UP—UP—up—up—up—hilli—hi—he—o-o-o!" shouted Harry, who was first awake the next morning. "Come, boys, botany for ever! Di-andria and Poly-andria, and ever so many more of them, will be up the Camp Hill; and then there will be monogamia, and cryptogamia, and ever so many more games, here, there, and everywhere. Come, boys, get up;" and then Harry accompanied the request with a hearty bang from his pillow, the result of which was, in the cases of both brother and cousin, a leap out of bed and a regular scuffle; then hasty dressing, and out in the garden again amongst the dew-wet flowers.

"There's old Sam, shaving away as usual," said Harry, as they reached the lawn, and saw the old man busy at work with his scythe. "I wonder what he has got to

tell us; I know he'll have something, so as to get rid of us all. Ah! don't old Sara hate to have us with him."

But Sam, although he expected it, was not to be teased very much upon this morning, for Philip made a remark which completely turned the current of Harry's thoughts, and away they all started back to the yard.

Dick greeted them with rapture; but Dick was not to be let loose, and he soon showed his disgust by sharp angry barks. The old raven came slily—hop, hop, hop—behind them, to give some one a dig with his hard beak; but Fred knew his tricks now and kept him at a distance; while Philip, who was not attending, received a sharp poke right in the calf of the leg, which sent him chasing his aggressor round the yard, armed with the stump of an old birch broom; but the raven hopped upon the dog-kennel, then upon the wall, and from thence up into one of the horse-chestnut trees, and so out of reach, for when the broom was thrown at him it only crashed amongst the branches and came to the ground, while the raven burst out into a series of harsh barks, that sounded very much like a laugh of derision.

"An old beast," said Philip, for his leg was bleeding a little, the dig having gone right through his trousers. "Never mind. I'll serve him out, for I'll let Dick loose at him the next time I catch him in the stables."

Meanwhile, Harry had entered the stable and climbed up the perpendicular ladder into the loft, where the boys could hear him stumping about in the dark place, stumbling over the hay and straw trusses, and at last he shouted—

"Why, they're not here, Phil."

"Yes, they are," said the one addressed. "I put 'em there myself, up in the corner, after we had them out last time. Look again."

Harry looked again, and again, and could not find what he was in search of, and said so; and then Philip called him "Old mole's eyes," and went up himself; while Fred waited underneath the trap-door. But Master Philip had no better success than his brother, and they came to the conclusion that the stilts they were in search of were gone; so they turned to descend, when Harry caught sight of the position Fred occupied, and pointed it out to Philip; and then, making signs, and catching up an armful of hay, Philip doing the same, the result was that poor Fred was nearly smothered beneath the fragrant shower that came down upon his head.

"Oh! I'll pay you for this, Master Harry," aid Fred, freeing himself from his load, and rightly judging who was the author of the mischief. "Mind that's a debt of honour, so look out."

Harry grinned defiance, and then hunted well through both stable and coach-house for the missing stilts, but without success.

"Why, I know where they are," said Philip all at once.

"No, you don't, old clever-shakes," said his brother.

"Well, you see if I don't tell," said Philip. "I know old Sam has hidden them because we walked all down the gravel-walk last month, before Fred came; and don't you remember it was wet, and we pretended that it was a flood, and that we were obliged to use the stilts to keep out of the water; and then Sam went and told Papa that we had made the path all full of holes with the stilts?"

“Oh! ah! I recollect,” said Harry; “and I remember your going down in the puddle. But do you think Sam took them?”

“I feel sure he did,” said Philip.

“Won’t we serve him out then,” said Harry. “Come on. Let’s pretend that we know he’s got them, and ask for them at once.”

Now, old Sam had been all this time very methodically shaving away at his grass, and congratulating himself upon the boys keeping out of the garden; but, to his horror and disgust, he at length saw them all come bearing down upon him full rush, evidently bent upon some errand that he would consider unpleasant.

“Ha!” said Sam, stopping to wipe his scythe, and drawing his rubber out of the sheath on his back. “Ha! I know what you all wants. You wants to know how the wopses’ nest is a gettin’ on.”

“No, we don’t,” said chief spokesman Harry; “but we’ll go presently and see, though. We want our stilts, that you’ve got somewhere.”

“Laws, Master Henry,” said the old man, pretending to be innocent, “whatever made you think of that?”

“Come now,” said Harry, “give ’em up directly, or we’ll run away with your tools. Give us the stilts.”

“I ain’t got ’em,” said the old man.

“No, but you’ve hid them away somewhere; so tell us directly.”

“Stilts—stilts,” said Sam, wonderingly; “what’s stilts?”

“Why, you know well enough,” said Philip; “and I know you’ve hid them away somewhere, because you thought we should forget them and not want them any more; so come now, Sam, tell us where they are, or we’ll all begin to plague you.”

“No, I weant,” said Sam, throwing off all disguise. “You don’t want them, and you’ll only go ‘brog—brog’ all down the walks, making the place full of holes, and worse than when people has been down ’em in pattens. I weant tell ee, theer,” said the old man, defiantly, in his broad Lincolnshire dialect.

“Yes, you will,” said Harry; “now come.”

“I weant,” said the old man again, beginning to mow.

“Never mind,” said Harry, “we’ll go and have a look at the wasps’ nest, and see if they are all killed, and then I know what we’ll do. I say, Fred,” he said loudly, “Phil and I will show you how they thin grapes.”

“Oh! laws,” said old Sam to himself, and bursting out into a cold perspiration, for his grapes were the greatest objects of his pride, and he used to gain prizes with them at the different horticultural shows in the district. Even Mr Inglis himself never thought of laying a profaning hand upon his own grapes, until Sam had cut them and brought them in for dessert; and now the young dogs were talking of thinning them, and the sharp-pointed scissors lay all ready; and what was worse, the key was in the door of the green-house.

“Oh dear! oh dear!” said Sam, throwing down his scythe, and hobbling off after the boys, who kept provokingly in front, and popped into the green-house just before him. “There,” he said, “I’m bet out with you; come out, and I’ll tell ee wheer the stilts are.”

“Honour bright, Sam?” said Harry.

“Oh! ah! yes,” said Sam. And then the boys coming out from beneath the pendent green bunches of grapes which hung thickly from the roof, the old man

locked the door up, and seemed to breathe more freely when he had the key safely in his pocket.

"I knew he'd hid them," said Philip.

"Now, then," said Harry, "where are they?"

"I've a good mind not to tell ee, you young dogs," said Sam.

"We'll get in at the windows, then," said Harry and Philip in a breath.

The old man glanced over his shoulder, and saw how easily the threat could be executed, and then, with a grunt of despair, said—

"Now, if I let ee have 'em, will you promise not to walk in them in the garden, and make holes?"

"Yes, yes," said the boys, and then Sam led the way to the stoke-hole of the green-house, where, tucked up in the rafters, and rolled tightly up in piece of matting, were the two pairs of stilts.

The boys seized them with delight; and Sam turned to go on with his work; but just as the stilt-stalkers reached the yard, and prepared to mount with their backs to the wall, clatter went the breakfast bell down went the stilts, and away scampered the boys to the breakfast-room window. On the way, however, they met Sam going also to his breakfast, and in doing so he would have to pass the yard, and Harry remembered that they had left the stilts there unprotected; so he and Philip scampered back again, just in time, for the old man could not pass the instruments which poked holes in his gravel-walks, and he was just gathering them up when he heard the boys' footsteps, and, leaving the stilts on the ground, he shuffled off as hard as he could.

They took the stilts indoors, and into the hall, to place up in a corner, and just as they were inside it struck Harry how nice it would be to walk along the large hall upon them; for the floor was composed of black and white marble in diamonds, so that he could have one stilt on a black diamond and another on a white, and then change about again. So he got his back up in the corner where the macintoshes and great-coats hung, and then put one foot in one stilt, and made a spring to get into the other, but gave his head such a crack against the brass hat pegs, that he came down quicker than he went up, and then rubbed his crown with a very rueful expression of countenance. However, Harry's was not a nature to be cowed at a slight difficulty; so shifting his position a little, he had another try, and was fairly mounted.

"Stump—stump; stump—stump; stump—stump," went Harry down the hall; and "stump—stump; stump—stump; stump—stump," he went back again, with a face beaming with satisfaction, but so intent upon what he was doing, that his forehead came sharply into collision with the swing lamp, and made the glass, and Harry's teeth as well, chatter quite sharply.

"Bother the stupid things," said Harry; "I wish they would not have such things in the hall."

Philip stood on the mat and grinned.

"Stump—stump; stump—stump; stump—stump," went Harry again, but keeping well clear of obstructions this time.

"Whatever is that noise?" said Mrs Inglis, listening to the stumping of the stilts; but taking no further notice, for she was making the tea, while Mr Inglis was looking over the contents of a newspaper which had just come in by post.

“Stump—stump” went the stilts, while Fred had slipped out of the breakfast-room to see what was going on, and now stood in the doorway making a sort of silent echo of Philip’s grin.

“Stump—stump; stump—stump; crish—crash—dangle,” said the stilts, the lamp, and Harry’s head.

“Whatever are those boys doing?” said Mr Inglis, jumping up and going to the door, closely followed by Mrs Inglis, and just as the young dog was stumping back after knocking his head against the swing lamp.

Mr and Mrs Inglis had better have stopped in the room, for no sooner did Harry see his father’s face issue from the door, than he let go of the stilts, and one fell in one direction, and one in the other. Stilt number one fell to the right, crash into the flower-stand, and chopped some of the best branches off the fuchsias; while stilt number two—oh! unlucky stick!—went crash down upon the great antique vase that stood in the hall upon a pedestal, knocked it off, and there it lay, shivered upon the marble floor.

Harry looked for a moment at his father, then at the vase, and then at the door and rushing out of it as hard as he could, was gone in a moment.

“Fetch back that boy,” said Mr Inglis, sternly, as he walked back into the breakfast-parlour, and rang the bell for one of the servants to clear away the fragments. “Fetch back that boy.”

Away darted Philip to execute his commission, while Fred, who felt very uncomfortable, followed his uncle and aunt back into the room, where they continued their breakfast—Mr Inglis only reverting to the newspaper again, and saying nothing about the accident. The first cup of tea was finished, but no Philip; no Harry. The second cup—no Philip; no Harry. And at last breakfast was nearly done, when Mr Inglis said—

“Wherever can those boys be?”

He had hardly spoken, when Philip came in to say that he could not find his brother anywhere; and all the time looking as miserable and dejected as though he had himself been the culprit Mr Inglis told Philip to sit down to his breakfast; finished his own; and then got up, and went out of the room.

In about a quarter of an hour he returned, followed by Harry, with his face bearing the mark of tears, and something uncommonly like a sob every now and then escaping from his breast.

Mr Inglis sat down again to his paper, and Harry tried to eat his breakfast, but was getting or very badly indeed, until, looking towards his father, he caught his eye. Mr Inglis smiled, and that smile seemed to act like magic upon the lad, for he finished his breakfast in good style—well making up for the lost time; while the sobs gradually ceased to interrupt his meal, and by the time he rose, Harry looked as happy again as ever.

After breakfast, when the boys were alone, not a word would Harry say about where he had been, nor yet what his father had said to him: but I happen to knew that it was no wonder that Philip could not find him out in the garden, nor in stable, coach-house, green-house, tool-house, or any other place upon the premises; for the fact was, that the boy had rushed out of the hall-door and round to the back door, where he had entered and gone up the back stairs to his room, where Mr Inglis found him lying upon his bed. I know also that Mr Inglis had a

long talk with his boy, and that something was said about running away, making the fault worse; but, as upon another occasion, when the Squire had a long talk with the boys in the library; I didn't feel disposed to play the spy, and then "tell tales out of school;" for I think that where correction or admonition is administered, it concerns only those to whom it relates; and I do not approve of a boy's best feelings being wounded, and his being also lowered in his self-esteem, by having witnesses of what takes place, or eaves-droppers, to carry the words about for other people to catch up and talk about afterwards.

Chapter 16

Up the Camp Hill.

"OH! isn't this a pretty walk?" said Fred, later on in the day, as they were ascending the winding road that led up the Camp Hill, a road that at every turn disclosed fresh views over the surrounding country. The whole party were there—Mrs Inglis and all, and busy enough they were collecting sprays, flowers, and leaves, as they went along; for rich indeed was the hill in floral beauties, fresh and bright, as they had just burst forth into bloom. Fred was busy as a bee collecting everything, and getting confused, and placing in his tin box the same kinds of plants two or three times over: but Fred was no botanist, only eager to learn; and very hard and tiresome to remember he found the names his uncle told him. However, he soon learnt which were the pistils, stamens, petals, and calyx of a flower, while of the other terms, the less we say the better; for although Fred had read a little upon the subject, his notions of classes and orders were rather wild. But for all that, he much enjoyed his trip, for no one could have ascended that path without feeling admiration of the many beauties it disclosed. The path had been cut entirely through the wood which surrounded the hill, while the feet pressed at every step upon the soft green elastic turf, that here grew of the finest texture, and in the shortest strands. Nowhere else could be found such large heaths, with their beautiful pinky lilac bells looking as though moulded in wax; while harebells, orchids, anemones, arums, formed only a tithe of the rich banquet of flowers which awaited the collector—and a most staunch collector was Mr Inglis. He used to say that he was one of the most ignorant of men, and the more he collected the more he found that out. No doubt, if he had kept entirely to one science, he would have been more skilled therein; but he said he liked that idea of a famous essayist, who compared a man who devoted himself entirely to one thing, to a tree that sent forth a tremendously great bough in one direction, while the rest of the tree was composed of wretched little twigs. He considered it better to have a little knowledge upon a good many subjects, than to excel so greatly in one only.

The view from the Camp Hill was one that could not be seen everywhere, for it overlooked a wide tract of the richest farm land in England. It was called the Camp Hill from the entrenchment at the summit, for here had the Romans in days long

gone by established one of those mighty works that, after fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen centuries, still exist by the score in our country, to show how powerful and highly-disciplined were the armies that the Roman Emperors sent into Britain. Fred was, however, rather disappointed at the Camp: he expected to have seen turrets and embrasures, and, if not cannon, at all events a few catapults and battering-rams. But no; there was nothing to be seen but a broad ditch encircling the summit of the hill, and now completely covered with trees and bushes, so that the bottom of the great trench formed a walk, where, even at mid-day, the sun's rays were completely shut out, and where the nightingale would sing, all day as well as all night long.

I am ashamed to say that all three boys very soon tired of botanising, and were searching about the shady paths for anything or nothing, as the case might be. Now it was after butterflies; now the discordant cry of the jay told of its nest being, at hand; while every now and then the scampering rustle of a rabbit amidst the underwood would start the boys off in full chase, and in almost every instance the fruit of their hunt was, seeing the little white tail of the rabbit as its owner scuffled down its hole under some hazel stub. Once, while they were deep in the thickest shade, Philip gave a regular jump, for a great brown owl started from its roosting-place in an oak-tree, and softly and slowly flapped its way down the dell, but soon to have its flight quickened by a host of sandmartins, which began to mob the stolid-looking old fellow, till they all passed out of sight in a curve of the pathway.

Mr and Mrs Inglis were resting in a rustic seat placed opposite one of the openings in the trees, where there was a splendid view right out to sea; and while Mr Inglis was scanning the horizon with his telescope, the lads felt themselves quite at liberty to have a good ramble. Their first excursion was right round the hill, down in the trench, and here there was plenty to have taken their attention for a day: there was an ant-hill, swarming with those great black ants found in the woods, whose hill looks one lightly shovelled-up collection of earth: then, close at hand, they heard the regular "tip-tap" of the great green woodpecker; the harsh "pee-pee-peen" of the wryneck; while, from far off, floating upon the soft breeze, came the sweet bell-tones of the cuckoo. Directly after, came again the harsh cry of the jay, to be succeeded by the soft cooing of the cushat doves; and every interval was filled up by the bursts of song from the small finches, thrushes, and other denizens of the wooded hill. In one fir tree there was a pair of tiny gold-crested wrens, beautiful little birds, which seemed to consider that their insignificance was quite enough to keep them from harm. So tame were they that they could have been struck down by a stick, which would have been their fate but for the interposition of Philip, who seized his brother's arm as he was raising his hand to deal the blow. In a box-tree they found the pretty covered-in nest of a bottle-tit, beautifully compact, with its tiny opening or doorway—feather-eaved—at the side. It was a great temptation, and hard to resist was the sight of that nest; it was only about five feet from the ground, and they could have cut off the branch and brought it away with the nest uninjured; but they contented themselves with marking the spot by cutting an arrow in the bark of one of the beech-trees, and promising themselves that they would have the nest when the birds had done with it. All at once a bird fluttered from a bush close by—a bird with a large head and marked in the wings with a good deal of white, and off went the boys in chase; but

almost at the first start, Philip stumbled by catching his foot in a long bramble runner, and went down sprawling amongst the heather, with Harry upon his back, for he could not pull up time enough to prevent stumbling over his brother. Away went Fred, all alone, and very soon he captured the strange bird, for its wing had been broken; but the muscles of the great beak it had were in a good state of preservation, as Fred soon knew to his cost, by the nip the prisoned bird gave him.

Fred shouted out with the pain, but he had grown more stoical since his sojourn in the country, and he held on tightly to his prize, which Harry declared, when he saw it, was a chaffinch with a swelled head; but afterwards, when they brought it to Mr Inglis, he told the boys it was a fine male specimen of the hawfinch, or grosbeak, rather a rare bird in the British Isles. A temporary cage was made for the prisoner by tying him up in a pocket-handkerchief, and then the party continued their ramble, finding fresh objects to take their attention at every step. Once a weasel ran out into the path, sat up a moment to look at the strangers, and then disappeared on the other side.

Fred was for giving chase, but his cousins gave him to understand how fruitless such a task would be; so he gave up his intention, and onward they still went, with fresh beauties springing up before them every minute. If they had been botanically disposed, they might have filled their boxes with mosses and lichens, from the tiniest green to the bright orange golden that clung round the branches and sprays of the bushes. Some of the beeches were almost covered with grey or creamy patches, of the most beautiful patterns and tints; while wherever a rotten bough, or fallen tree, lay upon the ground, the moss seemed to have taken full possession, and completely covered it with a velvety pile.

"I'm so thirsty, Phil," said Harry, all at once; "where's the old spring?"

"Oh! ever so far down the hill; and I don't know which side we are on now. Let's get back to Papa: I know there's something in the basket. Come along."

"It's no use to go back," said Harry, "let's go straight forward; they can't be far-off; I'll shout."

And shout he did, when a reply came from no very distant spot; so they struck off in the direction from which the sound proceeded, and soon found themselves again by the trench, where a portion of the gravelly soil had crumbled away, leaving the side so steep that Philip had to jump down about five feet before he could descend further. Harry thought this a capital chance for a practical joke, and gave a heavy stamp with his heel, so as to send a small avalanche of gravel and stones down upon his brother. But Harry had not calculated rightly this time, for Philip, as he heard the stones coming, made a buck leap, and came several feet lower down the side of the trench amongst the bushes; whilst Harry, by his stamp, loosened about a cartload of gravel, and, in company with Fred, went down with it, and they were buried up to the knees in the loose soil.

The first sensation felt was fear; but, upon finding that there was no further mischief to apprehend, Harry burst out laughing; Fred extricated himself, for he was in the loosest part of the heap of débris; while Philip, who was to have been the victim, seeing that his brother was stuck fast, indulged in a kind of triumphant dance round him, softly punching his head, and, of course, making the soil tighter at every jump.

"Oh! don't, Phil," said Harry; "pull a fellow out—there's a good chap."

But Philip would not, and threatened to leave him to his fate; so Harry appealed to Fred, and at last, by his assistance, got one leg out, when freeing the other proved an easy task. After which his lordship had to sit down and pull off his boots, to empty out the gravel and sand.

Meanwhile Fred was looking at the place where the earth had crumbled down, for his curiosity had been excited by what at first sight appeared to be a bit of old iron, of a very peculiar shape, and then, just beyond it, what bore the appearance of a bone, but so earthy that it crumbled under his foot.

"I say; look here," said he, pointing to something half enclosed in earth; "what's that?"

"Why, it's a skull," said Philip, coming up.

"You're a skull!" said Harry, leisurely buttoning up his boots again.

"Well, come and look," said Philip.

"Not I," said Harry; "you're up to some tricks."

"I'm not, I tell you," said Philip; "it's a skull, and there's another bit of one, and some bones; and here's an old farthing, such a thick one, and so badly made; and, ugh! why, that's a bit of jawbone, with all the teeth fallen out."

Just then Harry came up to them and saw that, indeed, they had hit upon something more curious—if less attractive—than anything they had before been that day.

"Why, this isn't a farthing," said Fred, who had been examining the coin; "I know what it is, it's a Roman coin. My Papa has got one, something like it."

Just then they heard Mr Inglis calling close at hand, and Philip bounded off to fetch him and tell of their discovery. This hastened the Squire's steps, and very soon he was carefully inspecting what the boys had laid bare. He immediately confirmed Fred's opinion that the coin was Roman, and also said that it was of silver, and appeared to bear the name of Constantine. Fred's piece of old iron was unmistakably the blade of a sword, but almost completely eaten away, and the bones and two skulls were directly pronounced to be human; but they crumbled away to dust almost immediately.

"Bravo, boys," said Mr Inglis at last; "you have indeed made a discovery. I have long been under the impression that this old trench must contain some curious antiquities, but never thought to see them laid bare in so singular a manner. We must have spades and pickaxes up here to-morrow, if we can get permission: but let's turn over the gravel with our sticks; we may, perhaps, find something more to-day."

"But won't the skulls and bones be nasty, and poisonous, uncle?" said Fred.

Mr Inglis smiled, and then said, "No, my boy. You have read how that God made Adam of the dust of the earth, and how that it is said, 'To dust thou shalt return,' and here you see how that it is so. Touch that bone ever so lightly, and you sea it has crumbled away to 'dust of the earth!' God has so arranged, by His great wisdom, that the earth shall deprive everything of its ill odour and poisonous nature when buried therein, so that even in some great pit upon a battle-field where, perhaps, scores—of the slain had been covered-in, in the course of time nothing would be found there but rich soil, for our bodies are chemically composed of nothing but salts and water. I do not mean what we commonly call salt, which is chloride of sodium, but of earthy salts."

“Well, but how can that be, Papa?” said Harry. “Has it ever been proved?”

“Oh! yes, my boy; and in no way more simply than by the very people who dug this trench. What did they often do with their dead, Harry?”

“Why, buried them, didn’t they?” said Harry. “Oh! no, I know; they used to make a great wicker idol, and put them in and burn them.”

“Why, those were the Ancient Britons, who used to do that with their prisoners,” said Fred.

“Oh, ah; so it was,” said Harry; “I forgot.”

“Why, they used to burn them; didn’t they, Papa?” said Philip.

“To be sure they did,” said his father. “And what were their urns for?”

“Oh! I don’t know,” said Harry, “if it wasn’t to make tea with.”

“For shame, Hal,” said Mr Inglis, good-humouredly. “Why, the ashes of the dead were collected and preserved in these cinereal urns; and what are ashes but earthy salts? Of course, in the process of burning, the water would be entirely driven off. But, look, Fred has turned up another coin.”

For want of more effective tools than walking-sticks, the search for relics was not very successful. Fred found another coin, and Mr Inglis turned out two more; but nothing else was discovered, though it was evident that a protracted search would lead to the discovery of perhaps many curious antiquities; for Mr Inglis said that this had been a very important station in the time of the Roman occupation of Britain; and he regretted that the owner of that property was not a person who took an interest in such matters.

Mr Inglis tried very hard to raise one of the skulls; but although the one that had been in the most perfect state at first seemed hard enough to roll down the slope, yet, upon being touched, it seemed to be nothing else but earth.

At last the signal for starting was given, and, laden with treasures, the little party slowly moved homeward. The walk was lovely, for the sun was sinking behind them, so that the whole landscape and the far-off sea were flooded with the golden light. The heat of the day, too, was passed, and for the most part they walked home in the pleasant shade of the trees, while, one by one, as the golden sunset paled, the moths and bats came out; the night-jar took his hawking flight round the trees; the beetles boomed and whirred; and just as they left the wood, as if to say farewell, an owl cried out, “Tu—whoo—oo!” and then was perfectly silent again. The evening now seemed so cool and fresh that the boys forgot their fatigue, and kept on chatting and planning for future excursions till they reached the gates of the Grange, just as the sun ceased to gild the weathercock at the top of the church spire.

“Now, boys, be quick,” said Mr Inglis, “for I’m sure we all want tea after such a walk as we have had; so hurry, hurry, and come down again quickly; and after tea we will see whether we can find out to what period the coins belong.”

If ever Mr Inglis was quickly obeyed it was upon this occasion, and, as to making a meal, I think no boys ever could—but, there—it is not fair to talk about it, for anybody would have felt hungry after such a ramble through the woods and over the hills. But at last the meal was ended, and Mr Inglis brought out his coins, and one or two books of reference. His first movement was to try and clean off the rust of about fifteen centuries—which time must have elapsed since they were last employed as “current money of the merchant:” but the efforts were not very

successful, neither were the attempts at deciphering the inscriptions, which were very faint and illegible; so he gave up the task for that evening; for, if the truth must be told, Mr Inglis was, like the boys, very tired, and not much disposed for study. As to Harry, he expressed an opinion to his cousin in a very low tone, that the Romans were all bother, and so was their language. But, by way of excuse, it must be said that Harry was very tired; and when people are very tired, they often say very cross and very stupid things; and this must have been the case at this particular moment, or Harry would never have made such a remark to his cousin Fred.

Mr Inglis afterwards had a long correspondence with the owner of the property, relative to the advisability of making excavations in the old intrenchment; but nothing satisfactory came of it, for there did not seem to be any disposition to grant Mr Inglis's request; and, therefore, the place remained unexamined.

Chapter 17

High Flying.

THE NEXT morning the boys had their regular run in the garden before breakfast, and then Harry divulged the plan of their morning's amusement—for the next day was to be devoted to fishing at Lord Copsedale's lake, when they hoped to persuade Mr Inglis to accompany them; the present day, which was first chosen, not being considered suitable, as Mr Inglis was going from home. Directly after breakfast, they set about the first part of Harry's plan, which was to get all the baits and tackle ready for the next day—a most business-like proceeding, but quite in opposition to Harry and Philip's general habit, for they in most cases left their preparations to the last moment. But not so now, for, as I said before, they wanted Papa to accompany them, and they well knew that he would not go unless there were plenty of good baits, and the tackle all in order. The first thing to be done seemed to be to get some good worms from down by the cucumber-frames, and then put them in some cool damp moss; but Philip opposed this, and showed some little degree of foresight, for, said he—

"We have never had the wasps' nest out of the tree yet; and we shall want the grubs, for Papa likes them for the trout and chub, and we shall want old Sam to split the tree up with his big wedges; while, if we go poking about round the cucumber-frames first, he'll turn grumpy, and won't split the old willow-tree for us."

"That's right, Phil, so let's go and get the tree split first; and then we'll turn up the old cucumber bed in fine style," said Harry.

Sam was soon found, but Sam was busy. Sam was weeding the "inguns," and "inguns was more consekens than the nasty wopses." So Sam had to be coaxed and cajoled; but Sam would not be either coaxed or cajoled, for he was very grumpy indeed; and the reason was, that he had had the lawn to mow that morning, and there had been no dew, and the consequence was, the grass, instead

of being easy to cut from its crispness and dampness, was very limp and wiry, so that poor Sam had a very hard and unsatisfactory job, and the effect of it all was that he was as limp and wiry as the grass had been. It was of no use to say, “Do, Sam,” or “Do, please, Sam,” or “That’s a good old chap, now,” or anything of that kind; for Sam weeded away viciously amongst the onions, and turned a deaf ear to everything; so Harry, the impetuous, was beginning to grow cross too, and to repent that they had not obtained the worms at first, when Sam showed the weak side of his nature, and from that moment he was a conquered man.

“Ugh!” said Sam, straightening himself with a groan, and rubbing his back where it ached, “Ugh! how blazing hot the sun is—always does shine like that when I be weeding. Oh, my back! Oh, dear!” And then Sam groaned, and stooped to his work again, saying, “And nobody never asks nobody to have so much as a drop o’ beer.”

“I’ll fetch you some beer, Sam, if you’ll go with us,” said Harry.

But Sam didn’t want any beer. Oh, no! He could do his work without beer. He never did do more than wet his lips; and so on. But Sam had given up the key of his fortress, and very soon Harry had been up to the house to fetch a jug of foaming, country, home-brewed ale, such as would really refresh the old man in his toil; for the day had set in excessively hot, and bade fair to become worse—if such an expression is not a contradiction. So Harry took the cool jug up to the old man, but “No! he didn’t want beer!”

But he did, though he would not own to it, and what was more, he wanted coaxing; and until he was coaxed, Sam growled away as much as ever, and weeded his onions.

“I say, Sam,” said Harry, with a knowing grin upon his countenance, and pushing the jug just under the old man’s nose, “I say, how good it smells!”

Sam couldn’t help it, he got a good whiff of the foaming ale in his nostrils, and he surrendered, sighed, and stretched out his hand for the jug, and then took such a hearty draught, that it seemed as though he never wanted to breathe again.

“Ha-a-a-a,” said Sam at last, with a comical look at Harry.

“Shall I fetch you the wedges, Sam?” said Harry.

“Eh?” said Sam.

“Shall I fetch the wedges?” said Harry again.

Sam did not answer for a minute, for his face was buried in the beer jug; but when he took it away again, he gave another sigh, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and then said in a very different tone of voice to the one he had spoken in before—

“Well, I ’spose you may as well.”

So the wedges and the great mallet were soon fetched, when they all went off to the fallen willow, which soon gave way to the blows bestowed upon it, and displayed a large hollow containing the papery nest of the wasps.

Fred gazed with astonishment at the curious structure, with its innumerable cells, many of which contained the grubs mentioned in connection with the fishing excursion. The poor wasps were lying dead by the hundred, and were shaken out, brushed into a heap, and then buried by Sam, who seemed to have an idea that, if this latter process were not attended to, they would most probably come to life

again. There was no fear of that, however, for the suffocating had been most effectually performed, and not a living wasp was visible.

By means of a little careful cutting, the nest was removed from the hollow tree almost entire, and, without remembering to say “thank you” to old Sam, the boys carried the nest up to the house, and then went in search of their worms. Harry soon fetched a fork, and Philip carried the moss-bag, while Fred, who hardly liked to touch the wriggling, “nasty things,” as he called them, looked on.

Now Fred was not much of a student of nature after all, or he would not have called worms “nasty things,” but have taken more notice of them as they were turned out of their damp bed, and seen that they were clothed with a skin whose surface reflected colours of prismatic hue, as bright and perfect as those seen upon some pearly shells. He would have seen how wonderfully the worms were constructed for the fulfilment of their apportioned position in the animal kingdom; how, without legs, or the peculiar twist of the snake, they crept swiftly over the ground by means of their many-ringed bodies; and also learned that, by their constant tunnelling of the ground, they prevented the water that sank from the surface from lying stagnant amidst the roots of the trees, and thus rotting them, but enabled it to fertilise larger spaces. Then, too, by their peculiar habit of drawing down dead leaves and straws, and small twigs, how all these rotted beneath the surface, and helped to renew the strength of the earth. Their casts, too, those peculiar little heaps which they throw up at the mouth of their dwellings, formed another source of fertility to the earth, by bringing up from beneath the surface unspent soil, and spreading it upon the top.

However, I must say, that I believe the boys thought of nothing else then, but of getting the finest red worms, and those marked with yellow rings round the body, as being especial favourites with the perch at the great lake.

At last a sufficiency had been obtained and put on one side in a cool place; and now a tin box with a pierced lid was brought out half filled with sand, and the boys started off to the village butcher’s, to get some gentles or maggots. This time they did not choose the path by Water Lane, as on the morning when they went to buy the new water-bottle, but strolled round by the road, talking earnestly of the sports of the following day. Fred listened very attentively as they trudged along, and rather strange were the ideas he had stored up respecting the big lake by the time they reached the butcher’s; it contained fish of wonderful size—monsters, which always lay snugly at the bottom of deep holes beneath overhanging trees—such profoundly deep holes! and when, by a wonderful chance, one of these enormous fellows was hooked, down he went to the bottom and struck his tail into the mud, so that it was impossible to draw him out, and then of course the line broke.

“Ah,” Harry said, “there were wonderful fish in that great clear-watered lake, with its bright gurgling stream, that came dashing down from the hills, and entered one end to leave it at the other in a cascade, that went plashing down the mossy stones, and along in a chain of streamlets and pools through the dark recesses of the wood, till it joined the river half a mile below. There never could have been such beautiful golden-scaled carp anywhere else, nor such finely-marked perch; while, as for eels, they were enormous. The pike, too, were said to be so large and so tame, that they would come to the side to be fed, and therefore

would have been easy to capture; but his lordship forbade any one pike-fishing in his lake, this being a luxury he retained for himself, except on special occasions, when he invited a friend to join him."

By listening to such a glowing account of the place, Fred's mind grew so excited that he would have liked to have started at once for the lake, and feasted his eyes upon the wonders; but the butcher's was now reached, and the fat dame in the shop having been told of the cause of their visit, "Willum," the boy, was called, who armed himself with a skewer, and then took the lads to a vile-smelling shed, where lay a heap of sheepskins and a bullock's hide, and from the insides of these, and, by poking out from amongst tendons of an old shin bone, the little tin box was soon filled with the great, fat, white maggots, the end of whose life, the beginning, and the middle, and all the rest of it, seemed to be to keep continually in motion with one incessant wriggle. The boy was recompensed with twopence, which he acknowledged by a tug at his greasy hair with his dirty fingers; and then a visit was paid to the shop, where Harry bought a sixpenny ball of twine, and three sheets of white and blue tea paper for some particular purpose, which Philip seemed to be alive to, but which they would not reveal to their cousin until they returned home.

Only one more visit had to be paid, and that was to a pretty whitewashed and thatched cottage, standing in its little garden, which teemed with fruit and flowers,—bright crimson Prince of Wales's feathers, cockscombs, stocks, wallflowers, and roses; while gooseberries and currants were bending the trees down to the earth with the weight heaped upon the boughs. The window of this cottage was decorated with about half a dozen glass jars, wherein reposed, in all their sticky richness, the toffee, lemon stick, and candy which old Mrs Birch used to make for the delectation of the boys and girls round. She had no brilliantly-coloured sweets; no sticks veined with blue, green, yellow, and red upon pure white ground; no crystallised drops, or those of clear rose-colour, for all her "suckers," as they were called in the neighbourhood, were home-made, and she used to show all her customers the golden bright brass pan which hung upon the wall by the fire, as the one in which all her succulent sweets were made. And where indeed were there such others? Even town-bred Fred, who had feasted on Parisian bonbons, and made himself ill by eating strange fruits off Christmas-trees, owned to the purity and delectability of old Mrs Birch's "butterscotch;" while, as to the brown lemon stick, it was beyond praise. Capital customers were the boys to the dame, who was a wonderful business-like old body in her spotted blue print dress, and clean white muslin handkerchief pinned tightly over her neck; and she told the boys in confidence what a wonderfully extended trade she might do if she gave credit; but how determined she was never to carry on business except upon ready-money principles; which had been her intention ever since William, the butcher's boy, ran up a score of tenpence three-farthings,—a score that had never been paid to that day, and, what was more, the old lady expected that it never would be.

The boys then returned in a state of cloyey stickiness, and very soon finished their preparations for the following day; and at last, by dint of coaxing, Philip persuaded Cook to make a little paste; Harry borrowed the housemaid's scissors, and then obtained from the tool-shed a couple of straight laths. These he

fashioned to his required size, and then, by means of a piece of waxed twine, securely bound one to the other in the form of a Latin cross, the upright limb being about eight inches longer than the others. These were now kept in their places by a tightly-tied string passing from one extremity to the other of the limbs of the cross; and then by means of a loop of string the whole was balanced, and found to be equal in weight as far as the two side limbs of the cross were concerned.

"Why, you are going to make a kite," said Fred.

"To be sure we are," said Harry.

"But the top ought to be round, and not made like that. That won't be half a kite."

"Won't it?" said Harry: "it will be more than that, for it will be a whole one."

"But it won't fly," said Fred.

"Fly!" said Philip. "It will fly twice as well as your stupid London-made kites; you see if it don't."

Harry was not a bit disturbed by his cousin's criticism, but continued his job to the end, pasting away in the most spirited manner, till he had made a very respectable-looking kite, half blue and half white, which he then stood on one side to dry, just as the dinner-bell rang.

Directly after dinner the boys set to work to make a tail for the kite, and also fitted it with wings—Fred being employed meanwhile in winding the string off the ball on to a stick, and joining any pieces that might exist, in case of an accident when the kite was up, as it would have been no joke for it to have broken loose. But Fred was not very well up in his task, and somehow or other made a perfect Laocoon of himself with the string, and got at last into a regular tangle, so that fully half an hour was taken up in endeavours to get it right again, which was only done at last with a knife, and at the expense of many yards of string.

At length all was in readiness, and away they went into the fields to fly the machine that had taken so much time to manufacture.

"Now, I shall get it up," said Harry, "because I made it; so you go and hold up down at the bottom of the field."

Away went Philip with the kite, Harry unwinding the string as he went; when they found out that they had got to the wrong way of the wind, and must change places. This was at length done, and then, when all was ready—

"Now then," cried Harry, starting off to run, but Philip held the kite too tightly, and the consequence was the sudden check snapped the string, and down went the kite again upon the grass. The string was tied, and a fresh trial made, and this time with rather better success, for up went the kite at a great rate for thirty or forty yards, when over it tipped, and came down head first, with what Philip termed a "great pitch," to the ground.

"She wants more tail," said Harry; so, by way of balance, two pocket handkerchiefs were tied to the end of the paper tail, and another attempt was made, but still without success, for on starting again, although the kite ascended capitally, yet when a little way in the air, Harry turned round to loosen out more string as he went, and running backwards, went down head over heels upon the grass, let go of the string, and away went the kite in a similar way to Harry, but

with the stick of string bobbing along the ground, and every now and then checking the kite by catching in the grassy strands.

Philip and Fred tried hard to cut it off and catch it, but it was of no use, for before they reached the string the kite had lodged in the cedar, and was ignominiously napping about as it hung by its tail.

"Now, there's a bore," said Harry, coming up, puffing and panting; "we shan't get it down without a ladder."

"Pull the string and try," said Philip.

Harry did as his brother said, and pulled, and pulled, and at last set the kite at liberty, but with the loss of half its tail, which hung in the tree, with the two pocket handkerchiefs fluttering about.

"Why, I can climb up and get that," said Harry, "I know."

"Well, why don't you try?" said Fred; for he had lost much of the nervous feeling which used to affect him when anything of this kind was in progress.

"He can't get it," said Philip. "He couldn't get the sparrow's nest."

But Harry stripped off his jacket, and, by means of a lift from Fred, got upon one of the great horizontal boughs, and soon contrived to reach the one to which the kite tail was fluttering. But Harry was at the thick end, by the tree trunk, and the tail was twenty feet further off, at the thin end; and, as those who have tested the wood in their lead pencils well know, cedar is very brittle. Now, Harry was no coward, but he knew that he would be laughed at if he did not succeed, so, in spite of the danger, he prepared to creep along the branch, a very awkward thing to do from the numbers of small projecting twigs, and the prickly nature of the spiny leaves. Still he persevered, and crept along a foot at a time, and nearer and nearer to the kite tail, till at last the branch began to bend terribly, bringing his feet almost in contact with the bough below him. Still he went on, and stretching forth his hand snapped off the twig which held the kite tail, and threw it down.

"Snip—snap—crish—crash—hurry—rustle—bump—bump—Bump!" went a noise; and, in less time than it takes to tell it, down came Harry, fully twenty feet, on to the grass at his brother's and cousin's feet, where he remained, looking very white, frightened, and confused; when all at once he got up, and making a wry face, said—

"There, I told you I could get it."

Poor Harry! He was much quicker in his descent than ascent, for the branch upon which he sat had snapped in two and let him down from bough to bough of the thickly-limbed tree till he bumped on the last, which was not above five feet from the ground, and at its extremities almost touched. It was a most fortunate thing that he was not injured seriously; but a few bruises and scratches were the full extent of the damages done to his skin, though his trousers and shirt told a very different tale.

"There," said Harry again, rubbing the green off his trousers, "I told you I could get the tail, didn't I?"

His companions both acquiesced in the ability, but did not seem to admire the plan of execution any more than Harry, who walked with a kind of limp, and contented himself with holding the kite up when the repairs were completed, and letting Philip run with the string, which he did so successfully that the kite shot up into the air and seemed to be most evenly balanced, for it rose and rose as the

string was slowly let out, till it attained a great height, and then seemed to be quite stationary in that soft and gentle breeze; but all the while pulling hardly at the string as though alive, and desirous to fly away and escape to some far-off region—though its destination would most probably have been the first tree, or, escaping that, the ground some quarter of a mile further on.

The boys sat down in the long grass, and took it in turns to hold the stick, amusing themselves by sending disks of paper up to the kite as messengers,—watching the paper circles as they skimmed lightly along the string. But they were very untrustworthy messengers as a rule, for some of them stopped half, quarter, or three-quarters of the distance up the string, sometimes for a long time, until an extra puff of wind started them again, and, what was worst of all, they none of them brought back any person.

They were sitting down, dreamily watching the kite and the great white silvery clouds floating across the blue sky, looking like mountains in some far-off land; some with snowy peaks, some with deep valleys; but all with a background of that deep clear blue so little noticed by us because so frequently to be seen. All at once came from the field on the right, rising and falling, now apparently close at hand, then as though far-off, a peculiar cry—

"Creek—creek; creek—creek," for about a dozen times, when there was a pause. Then again, the peculiarly harsh creaking cry was heard.

"There's an old meadow-crake," said Harry, who was holding the kite: "let's go and hunt him up; perhaps we could catch it."

"But who's to hold the kite?" said Philip.

"Put the stick in the ground, and leave it," said Harry, at once setting to work to put his project into execution, by thrusting one end of the stick to which the string was tied deeply into a crack in the ground.

"That won't be safe," said Fred, trying the stick.

"Oh yes, it will," said Harry, giving it a stamp on the top with his foot; "come along."

"Creek—creek," sang the landrail or meadow-crake, apparently a quarter of a mile off.

"Come on, boys," said Harry again, running off with a half limp, closely followed by Philip and Fred.

"Creek—creek," said the landrail, far enough down, away from where it had been heard at first.

"There's an old stupid," said Philip; "why, where are you?" he continued.

"Creek—creek; creek—creek," said the landrail again, as though just over the hedge, and not more than twenty yards from them.

"Here's a gap," said Harry, creeping through the hedge; "look sharp; we'll have him."

Philip and Fred crept through, and stood with Harry, looking for the bird they were to catch; but all was silent, except the hum of the insects amidst the hedge flowers.

"Now, there's an artful thing," said Philip.

"Creek—creek; creek—creek," came from the bottom of the field again.

"He's down at the bottom," said Harry, running along by the hedgerow toward the bottom of the field.

“Creck-creck; creek-creek,” said the bird again, and away started Philip in the opposite direction.

“Creek—creek; creek—creek,” said the bird again, close at hand.

“Why, I shall catch it,” said Fred to himself, for he had stayed behind; and now started off into the middle of the field in quest of the mysterious stranger.

“Creek—creek; creek—creek; creek—creek,” cried the bird, apparently here, there, and everywhere, but always invisible; and up and down, and round and round, ran the boys, until they all stood together at last, wiping the perspiration from their faces, and fanning themselves with their caps; while the provoking “Creek-creek” kept on as bad as ever for a while, and then all at once stopped; and, though they waited and listened attentively for a long while, not another sound could they hear.

“Ain’t it funny,” said Philip, “that you never can tell where those things are?”

“I think they must run very fast through the grass, so as to keep seeming to be in different places,” said Harry.

“Perhaps there’s more than one,” said Fred; “and they keep calling to one another.”

“Ah! perhaps there may be; but I think there’s only one. Did you ever read the ‘Boys’ Country Book,’ Fred? It’s the jolliest book that was ever written, ever so much better than ‘Sandford and Merton.’ There’s a bit in it about some boys playing truant from school, and they go hunting after a corncrake, as they call it there, and get into no end of trouble, and jump over a hedge into a garden, and break the glass, and get taken before a magistrate. Oh! I did like that book so. Phil and I always have had a hunt after the corncrakes since we read that; but we don’t get taken before the magistrates for it.”

The lads now returned towards their play-field to let the kite down, for it was growing towards tea-time; but they walked along, very slowly, for they were hot and tired with their exertions. They were walking along by the hedge-side, when something took Harry’s attention, and made him leap over the great bed of nettles, which rose from the ditch, to the further bank.

“Look here, boys,” he shouted; “here’s a jolly nest, full of eggs; only look.”

The others were at his side in a moment, and, sure enough, Harry had found a nest in the bottom of the hedge worth finding, for it was the nest of one of the hens, which had been laying astray till there were fifteen eggs collected together, from which the old truant no doubt meant to have a fine brood of chickens; and perhaps would have done so but for Harry’s discovery.

The eggs were put in Fred’s handkerchief, for Harry’s and Philip’s were left a hundred yards high in the air, when they went in chase of the meadow-crake; and then they went across the field to where the kite stick was left. They were at first too intent upon the eggs,—which they counted three or four times over,—to think of the kite; but when they did, and came to look, the stick was gone; the string was gone; The Kite Was Gone! There was no mistake about it; and though, as a matter of course, if the stick went, the string and kite must go too, yet the boys seemed to make the discovery in the above order, and thus have I recorded the facts.

“It’s blown away,” said Fred; “let’s go and find it;” and off he started in the teeth of the wind.

“What’s the good of that?” said Philip, shouting after his cousin; “it will be this way.”

Fred returned as hard as he could; and off the boys started in, as nearly as possible, a line with the direction in which they left the kite flying. Every now and then they had to make a deviation, but still they persevered, looking into every garden, peering into every tree, till they were about a mile from home. Nobody had seen the kite, nor yet heard of it; so nothing remained but to trudge wearily back—hot, fagged, and low-spirited, for, as Fred said, “It was such a beauty!”

“And then there were our two little white silk handkerchiefs,” said Philip.

“And all that great ball of string,” said Harry.

And then they trudged on again in silence.

“Oh! do carry these eggs a bit, somebody,” said Fred; “they are so heavy.”

But they were not so heavy as they were at first, for Fred had managed to give them a rap up against something, and broken two or three,—the rich yolks having filtered through the handkerchief, and left only the shells behind.

“Yah!” said Harry, as he took hold of the handkerchief, and placed one hand underneath to steady it while he got fast hold. “Yah! how nasty,” he said, holding up his sticky hand, and then rubbing it upon the grass.

In spite of the disappointment they had just met with, they all laughed heartily at Harry and the broken eggs, and soon after turned into the gate, and went in at the side-door—hurrying in, for it was past tea-time; when the boys stared, for the first thing that met their gaze upon entering the hall was the blue and white kite, with the ball of string neatly wound up, and the tail arranged carefully from top to bottom, and all leaning up against the wall as though it had never been used. The cheer the boys gave at the discovery brought out Mr and Mrs Inglis, when it came out that the Squire had strolled into the field to speak to the boys, and found the kite flying itself, with the breeze rather on the increase; and not seeing anybody, and at the same time thinking the kite might break loose, he had wound it in, and taken it with him to the house. As may be supposed, the tired and dispirited feeling that oppressed the boys left them in a moment; and then they displayed the riches of the nest they had found in the bottom of the hedge, of course making exception of the three eggs Master Fred had demolished during their search for the kite.

Chapter 18

A Day‘s Fishing at the Lake.

SOMEHOW OR another nearly all my chapters begin with what the boys were doing in the early morning; and, after all, I do not know that I could begin them at a better time, for really and truly these chapters were begun early in the bright summer mornings, when the dew was sparkling on the grass, and all the birds warbling away as though they had a certain amount of singing to do, and wanted to have it finished before the heat of the day set in. And now on this particular

morning, which, for a summer morn, is all that can be desired—I mean the morning that I am about to describe, not this one upon which I am writing—up jumped Harry, and, as though in dread of some trick being played, up, almost simultaneously, sprang Philip and Fred; had a good souse in their cold water basins; and, having hastily dressed, ran down to see that everything was ready for the projected fishing trip.

There the things were: rods, lines, hooks, winches, landing-net, baits, ground-bait; in short, everything, from the basket that was to hold the fish, down to the tiny hook that was to catch them.

Breakfast finished, the dog-cart was brought round to the door and soon packed with tackle, baits, and baskets; for beside the fish-basket, there was another one that seemed to go by the rules of contrary, for whereas the fish-basket went out empty and came back, or ought rather to have come back, full,—this other basket invariably went out fall, and as invariably came back empty. There were no half measures about it, for it always came back according to the same rule. But then it was not a fish-basket; I don't think it ever did have fish in but once, and then the fish was pickled—pickled salmon. But it was a capital basket, a regular cornucopia of a basket, and used to disclose when opened such treasures as would have gratified any hungry person; and as for the scent that it exhaled, why the very flies from far enough used to come buzz-buzzing about, so ravished were they by the rich odour.

Harry brought the basket out to put in the cart, and he gave such a satisfied grin as he did so, and smelt at one corner of the lid, smacking his lips afterwards with quite a hungry sound, as though he had not just had a regular hearty breakfast, and left off eating last of everybody at the table. But I have said before that Harry was a terrible trencherman; and I almost wonder that the school authorities where he went did not insist upon a higher rate of pay for him.

Mr Inglis took the reins and mounted to his seat, and the boys to theirs. "Good-byes" were waved to Mrs Inglis in the porch, and then away started the horse, with such a vigorous leap, that the two boys, Harry and Fred, who were behind, nearly rolled out of their places, and only held on by grasping the iron side-rail pretty tightly.

What a delightful affair a country ride is on a bright morning before the sun has attained to sufficient height to render his beams oppressive! There's a soft breeze plays upon the cheek, and rustles through the hair; the distant view looks more beautiful than later in the day, for the shades are deeper, and there is generally a soft haze lingering by the wood-side, where the sun has not yet driven it away; soft and shady look the great horse-chestnut trees, although the blossom-spikes have given way to little prickly seed-vessels, but the great fingered fronds droop gracefully towards the ground, and form one of the thickest of leafy shades. At this hour the sun has not drunk up all the dew-drops, and bright they look wherever they hang in little pearly rows, reflecting the sun in the most dazzling of colours; and yet how often we pass all these, and hundreds of other beauties of the country, either unnoticing or merely regarding the way in which they blend into one beautiful whole.

Mr Inglis had been persuaded into making one of the party, and delighted the boys were with the success of their coaxing, each being ready to take the credit of

the success to himself: though the real cause of Mr Inglis's agreeing to accompany them was that he thought they would be better taken care of, and less likely to get into any scrape.

The wheels spun round merrily, and all congratulated themselves upon the glorious day they had for their excursion, a day that lent its brightness to everything, and would, no doubt, have sent the party home quite happy if not a fish had been caught. It was a pretty drive, between waving cornfields and oak-groves, and over a golden furzy common, where Harry had to jump down and hold a gate open for the car to pass through, and again on the far side; and then down in a valley where a rivulet crossed the road, at the sight of which the horse pretended to be dreadfully alarmed, and capered and frisked about as much as to say he dared not wet his feet, nor attempt to cross; until Mr Inglis was reduced to one of two expedients,—to get down and lead the horse across, or to give him a little wholesome punishment with the whip. Now bright sparkling water is delightful and cool in the summer-time, but, as the pleasure is lost when the feet are bathed with boots and trousers on, Mr Inglis gave up all idea of walking through the water, so he gathered up the reins, and taking the whip, which had stuck unused by his side, gave Mr Obstinate a sharp cut, when away he darted to one side of the road, and expressed himself by his actions as ready to leap over the hedge. But this was not required, so he was backed, and another smart application of the whip administered, when away he darted to the other side, and even placed his forefeet upon the bank; but now Mr Inglis took him regularly in hand, and, turning round, trotted him back for a hundred yards, and then, tightening the reins, drove straight at the rivulet, which was only a few inches deep. But it was of no use, for the stupid thing had evidently taken it into its head that it must be drowned if the stream were forded; so, stopping short, it stood up on its hind legs and began to beat the air with its fore feet as though dancing. A smart crack from the whip brought the tiresome animal down again upon all-fours, and, reluctant as the driver was to punish the poor brute, he now found that it was absolutely necessary, and sharply and vigorously applied the lash to its sides.

For a minute or so the question seemed to be—"Who shall be master?" and then the horse gave in, as much as to say, "Oh! don't; it hurts," and, starting forward, gave a leap that cleared the dreadful stream, and nearly upset the dog-cart into the bargain; and then, as though fearfully alarmed at what it had left behind, the horse tried hard to break into a gallop to get away as fast as possible; but a strong hand was at the reins, and very soon old Tom settled down again into an easy trot, although dreadfully ruffled in his nerves by the late dread adventure.

And now Harry had to get down again to open another gate, which he did before they saw that a woman was coming out of a pretty lodge just inside, and then, for a quarter of a mile, they drove through a fine avenue of shady trees, to look down which seemed to be like peering through a long leafy green tunnel, at the end of which could be seen portions of the noble castellated mansion of Lord Copsedale, built in imitation of the feudal homes of former days, but with a greater attention to comfort and the admission of light and air.

Mr Inglis drove into the large court, and, leaving the horse with one of the stablemen, the party strolled down past the great walled garden and the quaint

parterre, past the head of the lake, where the water rushed bubbling and foaming in, and where they could see the roach lying by hundreds; and then along by the green edge of the lake to where, in a semicircular sweep, a well-kept piece of lawn-like turf, backed up with a mighty hedge of evergreens, formed about as delightfully retired a spot as could be found anywhere for a fishing-party to make their resting-place, and dip their lines in the deep water,—here and there overshadowed with trees, down beneath whose roots, in the great holes, the finest fish were said to lie. The water looked in beautiful condition for fishing, not being too clear; and pushing about amidst the lilies and great water weeds that occupied the surface, in many places could be seen great chub and carp, snapping every now and then at the flies, but in a lazy, half-hungry sort of manner.

The spots Mr Inglis chose for fishing were three, reserving one for himself, and all these were well clear of weeds, and at a few yards' distance the one from the other, so as to insure quiet,—about the greatest requisite for making a basket of fish; for the finny denizens of the water seem to be as keenly alive to strange sounds as they are to strange sights, and the unlucky youngster who laughs, and talks, and shows himself freely upon the bank of the place where he is fishing, may fully expect that the fish near him will all be on the move, and seek for quiet lodgings in some other part of the pond, lake, or river. They don't seem to mind seeing one of their relations hooked, and then dart frantically about in all directions, as though seized with a mad exploring fit, till, panting and tired out, he is dragged to the side and landed. They do not seem to mind this, for they will follow the example of the hooked fish, and eagerly take the bait one after another, until, perhaps, the greater part of a shoal is captured; but the angler must be upon his guard, and mind that the wary fish do not catch sight of him.

And now rods and lines were fitted together; hooks baited; ground-bait lightly thrown in, and the business of the day commenced; though, for my part, I could have wished for no pleasanter business than to have sat in the shade watching the fish and water insects darting about in the lake, and the myriads of insects in the air, to whom the lake seemed to possess so great an attraction that they kept falling in, and every now and then were captured by some hungry fish. I could, I say, have wished for no pleasanter business than watching all this, and the flecked clouds far up in the sky, so fine and soft, that they seemed almost melting away into the delicate blue above them. But there was other business for the visitors, for the fish fed well that day, and roach and carp of small size were freely landed. This was not all that was wanted, however, for the desire of the anglers was to hook one of the great carp that every now and then kept springing almost out of the water, far out in the middle of the lake, and making a splash that of itself alone whispered of pounds weight. But, no; the old fellows would not be caught,—they left that to the younger branches of their family, who fell in tolerable numbers into the basket brought from Hollowdell.

All at once Fred called out that he had caught a big one, and, from the way his rod bent, this was evidently the case—the fish seeming to be making determined efforts to perform the feat described by Harry and Philip—namely, that of sticking his tail into the mud and there anchoring himself. Mr Inglis and the boys came up to lend him assistance, when his uncle smiled, for he knew what it was that Fred had hooked.

“Isn’t it a big one, Papa?” said Harry; “look how he pulls.”

“Don’t I wish I had him,” said Philip.

“Land it, Fred,” said Mr Inglis; “and mind it does not tangle your line,—pull away.”

Fred did as his uncle told him, and pulled away, so that he soon had twisting upon the grass a very tolerably sized eel, writhing and twining and running in beneath the strands; slipping through the hands that tried to grasp it; and seeming quite as much at home on land as in the muddy water at the bottom of the pond. As for Fred, he stood aloof holding his rod, and leaving all the catching to his cousins; the snaky eel presenting no temptation to him—in fact, he felt rather afraid of the slimy wide-mouthed monster.

At last the eel was freed from the hook, and lay quietly coiled round the bottom of the basket, turning several small fish out of their places, and making a considerable hubbub amongst the occupants of the wicker prison, the excitement being principally displayed by flappings of tails and short spring-back leaps.

All this time Mr Inglis was quietly landing a good many fish, most of which were very fair-sized roach, with an occasional perch; but, soon after Fred’s exploit with the eel, he called gently to Harry for the landing-net, and this summons caused the other members of the party to come up as well, when they saw that Mr Inglis had evidently hooked a large fish, and was playing him—many yards of his running line being taken out. The fish, however, seemed to be rather sluggish in its movements, keeping low down as though seeking the bottom; upon which Fred declared it was a great eel. But it was no eel, though a mud-loving fish, as was shown when he became ready for the landing-net, Harry deftly placing it beneath the fish’s slimy side, and lifting it upon the grass.—And now its golden sides glittered in the sun as it lay upon the bright green daisy-sprinkled bank, in all the glory, as a fisherman would term it, of a noble tench of nearly four pounds’ weight—a great slimy fellow, with tiny golden scales and dark olive-green back, huge thick leathery fins, and a mouth that looked as though the great fish had lived upon pap all its lifetime. He had been a cowardly fish in the water, and yielded himself up a prisoner with very little struggling—nothing like that displayed by a perch about a quarter his size, which Mr Inglis next hooked and played, and then lost through its darting into a bed of strong weeds and entangling the line, so that the heavy clearing ring sent down towards the hook proved inadequate to the task of releasing it, and the line broke, and the fish escaped with at least a yard of shotted silkworm gut hanging to the hook.

Fred was very fortunate, for he, sitting quietly beneath a tree, caught two or three very nice carp, independently of about a dozen roach and perch; while Harry, the impetuous, first on one side, then on another, caught scarcely anything, and would have hindered his brother and cousin from the success which rewarded their patience, if Mr Inglis had not kept to a rule which he made, that no one angler should fish close to another; for Master Hal, directly a fish was caught on either side immediately concluded that where the fish was caught would be a better place for him, and accordingly began to trespass.

All at once, just as Philip had hooked a perch and was drawing it to shore, there was a mighty rush through the water, and something seized the fish and began

sailing with it backwards and forwards, bending Philip's light rod nearly double, for he had no running tackle, and only a thin line.

"Papa! Papa!" shouted Harry, "look here; Phil has such a bite!"

Mr Inglis came up to see what sort of a bite it was that Philip had, and at once perceived that a good-sized pike had taken his prize, and was holding on fast, as though he did not intend to let go, although there was a pretty good strain kept up by Philip. Of course, capturing the pike would have been out of the question with Philip's light tackle, even if it were not forbidden; so there was nothing left for it but to wait and see if the pike would leave the perch, for Philip did not feel disposed to give his fish up if he could help it, for it was what Harry called a regular robbery; so, for three or four minutes, it was—pull pike—pull Philip,—till at last, quite in disgust, the pike let go, gave one swoop with his tail, and was gone.

Philip then landed his perch, which seemed quite dead, and a piece was bitten completely out of its side.

"What a savage!" said Philip; "only look what a bite he has taken out of my poor fish! Don't I wish I could have caught him!"

"Ah, Philip," said his father, "you did not expect to have hold of such a fish as that; but it is not at all an unusual incident, for the pike is a most ravenous fellow, and will take anything that comes in his way. On one occasion I caught a small pike with a piece of paste, and another with a worm,—both very unusual baits for there to take, as their prey is small fish, while most people are of opinion that they will not touch perch on account of their sharp back fin; but we had proof this afternoon that they will. But the most curious thing that I ever knew a pike to take was a leaden plummet, which it seized one day when I was plumbing the depth in a canal previous to bottom fishing, as we have been to-day. As a matter of course I was much surprised, as no doubt the pike was also, when he felt himself hooked, and, after a struggle, I drew him to land. But come, boys, I think it is time to start; so let's be for packing up."

"Oh! Pa," said Harry.

"Oh-h-h-h! Pa-a-a-a," said Philip.

And "Oh-h-h! Uncle," remonstrated Fred.

But Mr Inglis was inexorable, for the afternoon was passing away, and the evening closing in; so the spoils were collected and placed in the basket, when it was found that Fred's eel had disappeared, having crawled out, and, no doubt, wriggled through the grass into the lake again. However, there was a very fair basket of fish to take home; and, when all the tackle had been packed up, and they returned to the yard and placed the things in the dog-cart, the horse was put to, and, freshened with his long rest, he made the wheels spin merrily round, and the dust fly back in a cloud from his heels, as he trotted homeward as fast as he could, well knowing that there was a snug, clean stable waiting for him, and plenty of fresh hay and sweet corn to enjoy after his long journey.

The sport of the day formed a never-tiring theme for conversation during the ride home; every finny captive being exalted into almost the importance of a whale. The only person at all dissatisfied with the day's proceedings was Harry, who rather felt that his want of success was owing to the lack of perseverance. However, he made vows of future attention to everything he attempted, and was

drawing a very brightly-coloured plan for the future, when home was reached, and Mrs Inglis seen waiting in the porch to view the fruits of their day's angling.

Chapter 19

Old Sam's Troubles—A sad Story.

"NOW, I don't care whether you gets punished or not; but I means to tell master, for you all oughter know better, and it ain't right."

"But I tell you we didn't do it, Sam," said Harry.

"Ah! don't tell me; I knows you did. There's footmarks all along from the gap, right across the potato piece, and everybody else will begin to go the same way, and make a regular path of it."

"But we didn't go that way," chorussed the boys.

"Why, what an old stupid it is," said Philip; "he won't believe anything."

Sam's trouble was a trampled track across a newly-enclosed piece of ground, which Mr Inglis had lately purchased near the village, and Sam had planted with potatoes for home consumption. It certainly was annoying, for a ditch had been cut round it, a bank made, and, on the top, a neat little hedge of hawthorn planted; but some idle people were in the habit of jumping across the ditch, trampling down the little hedge, and then making a track right across the corner of the field to the other side, where, in getting out, they trampled the hedge and bank down again, and all just to save themselves a walk of about fifty yards round, where there was a good path. But so it was: the property had lain in dispute for many years, during which time people had cut off the corner, and made themselves a track; and now that it was purchased, and had become private property, it seemed that there were some two or three obstinate, unpleasant people, who would not alter their plans, but took delight in the paltry piece of mischief of destroying what had been so carefully put in order. But Sam had always one complaint string upon which he fiddled or harped; and so sure as anything like mischief was done anywhere, he always declared it was "them boys," who were "always up to suthin, drat 'em." It was so when the walnuts were stolen, and the tree, broken about. Sam was sure it was "them boys," and he went and told his master of Harry and Philip's "capers," as he called them. But Sam was wrong then, as upon many other occasions, and also upon this one, for a sad story hangs to that affair about the walnuts; and I do not think it will be out of place if I go back about a year and nine months, and leave the trampled path for the present, while I take up another.

Mr Inglis had standing in one of his fields, about fifty yards from the lane which led down to the mill, a very fine walnut-tree. The tree was not only fine in size, but noble in appearance, and the walnuts that it bore were of the largest and sweetest grown anywhere for miles round, and Mr Inglis rather prized these nuts, for they kept well, and might be seen upon his dessert-table long after Christmas time.

Now, it so happened that just as the nuts were getting ripe, and the first ones began to fall, breaking their green husk when they touched the ground, and setting the clean pale-brown shell at liberty,—it was just at this time that Sam found out that some one had been up the tree picking the walnuts, for not only were a great number missing, but the ground beneath was strewed with leaves, broken twigs, and walnut husks, with here and there a brown-shelled nut which the plunderer had looked over in his hurry.

No sooner did Sam see the mischief than he hurried off to the house, and bursting breathlessly into the breakfast-room, announced that Masters Harry and Philip had been taking all the walnuts.

Mr Inglis frowned, and told Sam, rather sharply, to knock before entering another time, and then turned to his sons, and asked them if what Sam said was true.

"No, Papa," they both exclaimed indignantly, "we have not touched them."

"Only," said Harry, recollecting himself, "I did throw a stone in the tree yesterday, as we went down the lane, but it didn't knock any down, and I should not have thrown only Phil said I couldn't throw so far."

"Ah! but I'm sure it was them," said Sam.

"Hush! Sam," said Mr Inglis; "and now leave the room. I'll investigate the affair after breakfast."

Sam left the room anything but pleased, for he thought that he ought to have been praised for his energy, and so he told Cook in the kitchen when he went through, and then stopped and told her all about it; when Cook declared it was a shame, and gave Sam a cup of tea to mollify him, for Cook and Mary were just having breakfast. As soon as Sam had closed the door, Mr Inglis turned to his sons, and asked them if they knew anything about the tree, or who was likely to have taken the walnuts; for in this quiet district an act of theft was of such rare occurrence, that it caused great excitement; besides which, Mr Inglis was deservedly so well respected by the poor people round, that, sooner than touch anything belonging to him, they would have formed themselves into special constables to protect his property.

But neither Harry nor Philip could give the slightest information, so the breakfast was finished, and, in the course of the day, Mr Inglis had his suspicions directed towards the scapegrace son of an old woman in the village. This young man had been employed in the neighbouring town, but for a most flagrant act had been tried, and sentenced to five years' penal servitude. He was at this time at home upon what is called a "ticket of leave;" that is, he had a portion of his sentence remitted for good conduct in prison, and he was now in the village. But Mr Inglis was averse to proceed upon suspicion; in fact, he was averse to punishing the culprit at all, even if he brought the theft home to him; and therefore he took no steps in the matter.

Two nights after, a quantity of the walnuts were again stolen; and on Mr Inglis being informed of this new attack upon his crop, he told Sam that he would have them all thrashed on the following day, and place them under lock and key.

"Hum!" said Sam to himself; "and then they'll have a go at the apples. I knows it's them youngsters. Now, then," he said, for Harry and Philip just came up in the midst of the old man's soliloquy, "now, then, where's all them nuts?"

“Get out,” said Harry, “we never touched them. But it’s no use to tell such an old unbeliever as you are. We didn’t touch them; did we, Phil?”

Phil followed his brother’s example, and strenuously denied the impeachment; but Sam would not be convinced, and went muttering and grumbling away to his work, while Philip stood with tears in his eyes, for he could not bear the idea of his word being doubted. Harry did not mind it much; but Philip was obliged to go behind the large clump of laurustinus and pull out his handkerchief and blow his nose a great deal, and wipe the eyes that would brim over.

“What’s the matter, Philip?” said his father, who had come up unobserved.

Philip could not speak for a moment, for the tears would come faster, and a round sob seemed to stick in his throat, and would not go either up or down. At last, however, he told his father the cause of his tears; and Mr Inglis was very angry, saying that he would not have the honour of his boys doubted, for he had perfect reliance in their word, knowing that they had always been truthful; and therefore he would not have another word said about the walnuts; and the consequence was, that Mr Sam came in for a very sharp reprimand that morning; but, for all that, he looked at the boys the next half-hour, when he met them, as much as to say, “I know you got the walnuts,” though he did not say so.

But old Sam was wrong, as was, sad to state, very soon proved; for the next day being very wet, the walnuts were not thrashed, the weather necessitating the nut harvest being deferred for another day.

Upon the following morning, while Mr and Mrs Inglis and their sons were sitting at breakfast, Mr Inglis knit his brows, for old Sam, without studying the lesson upon decorum that his master had given him but a few days before, burst into the breakfast-room again, but this time through the French window opening on the lawn.

“Sam,” said Mr Inglis, sternly, “what can—” but he interrupted himself upon seeing that the old man was all in a tremble, and that the perspiration stood in great drops upon his forehead. “Why, what is it, man, speak out!”

But Sam could not speak out, for he was too excited, and though his lips moved no sound came from them. However, he caught his master by the sleeve, drawing him towards the window, and Mr Inglis followed him. Harry and Philip rose from their seats, but Mr Inglis motioned Mrs Inglis and them to keep their places, and closed the window as he went out. Sam led the way down the garden towards the fields, and said something to his master which made him quicken his steps until they reached the great walnut-tree, where, beneath one of the largest boughs, lay the body of a man, with his head turned in a very unnatural position, and one of his arms bent under him.

Upon first looking at the figure, Mr Inglis thought the man was dead; but on touching him he gave a slight groan upon which Sam was despatched for assistance, while his master placed the sufferer in an easier position, during which he moved slightly and groaned again, but remained perfectly insensible. While waiting for the return of Sam, Mr Inglis saw but too plainly the cause of the accident: scattered about upon the grass were walnuts, twigs, and leaves; while tightly clutched in the man’s hand was a red cotton handkerchief nearly full of the fruit; and his trousers and jacket pockets were filled as full as they could hold. There was no doubt now as to who was the culprit, but Mr Inglis felt a sinking at

the heart as he thought of the severe punishment that had fallen upon the offender, who proved to be none other than the man home with a ticket of leave, but who had not been cured of his dishonest propensity.

Sam soon returned with two or three farming men, who, under the direction of Mr Inglis, lifted a gate off its hinges, and laid the man as gently as they could upon it, and then, one at each corner, bore him out through the open gateway into the lane, and so to the village inn, a boy in the meantime being despatched for the doctor. Mr Inglis would have taken the poor fellow to the Grange, but for the reflection that it would only be a great shock to Mrs Inglis, and the ends of humanity would not in any way be served, for assistance could not be obtained a bit sooner, but rather the reverse.

With some difficulty the man was carried into a room at the inn, and it being found impossible to carry him upstairs, a mattress was brought down, and he was laid upon it. He groaned slightly upon being moved, tenderly as the men handled him, but remained quite still upon the mattress upon being laid there.

He was a fine-looking, sun-browned young fellow, but his face was now disfigured by the fall and contracted with pain; and Mr Inglis could not but feel sad to look upon so pitiable a sight—a fine, hearty young man stricken with death through the act of petty theft of which he had been guilty.

At length the doctor arrived—the same gentleman who had attended poor Fred in his narrow escape from drowning. He made his examination, and found that one arm was broken, and the neck so injured that he shook his head, and whispered to Mr Inglis that the bones were dislocated; and in reply to the inquiry whether there was any hope, he shook his head again. He then did all that was possible in such an extreme case, and sat down in company with Mr Inglis to see if the poor fellow would revive; but they waited in vain, for after about an hour had passed, during which the doctor had watched every change, he suddenly rose up from leaning over the injured man, laid his hand upon Mr Inglis's shoulder, and walked out of the room with him, whispering some words that caused Mr Inglis to sigh, and then to slip a sovereign into the hands of the poor old woman, the mother, who was sobbing upon the settle in the common room of the inn.

The death caused a great stir in the village, and many people said that it was a judgment upon the man for his sin; but Mr Inglis was deeply grieved, and said that he would rather that all the fruit in the garden had been stolen than such an awful punishment should have befallen the man.

And now to return to the beaten path: Sam persisted that it was our young friends, so they went to look at the trampled place, and one and all declared it was a shame.

All at once Harry made a proposition which caused old Sam's mouth to expand into a grin, after which he gave a series of hearty chuckles, and slapping the boy on the shoulder, exclaimed, "Well, it couldn't a been you arter all, Master Harry—(chuckle, chuckle, chuckle)—we'll do it this very night, we will."

What they did that very night will come out in due course.

Chapter 20

Mr Jones‘s Mishap.

ABOUT ELEVEN o’clock the next morning, Mr Inglis was sitting in his study, writing; Mrs Inglis was working at the open window, and occasionally watching the boys, who were amusing themselves upon the lawn, when all at once a knock came at the study-door.

“Come in,” said Mr Inglis, and in came Mary, trying to look very serious, but evidently struggling with a laugh which would keep crinkling up the corners of her mouth, although she kept smoothing them out with her apron.

“Well, Mary?” said her mistress.

“If you p–p–please ’M,” said Mary, who then stopped short, for something seemed to have got in her throat.

“Mary!” exclaimed Mrs Inglis, severely.

Poor Mary looked as serious directly, as if she were going to lose her situation, and making an effort she began again.

“If you please, ’M, here’s Mr— Oh! dear; oh!—hoo—hoo—guggle—guggle—gug—gug—gug; choke—choke; cough—cough,” went Mary, burying her face in her apron, and completely losing her breath, and turning almost black in the face with, her efforts to stifle her laughter. “Oh! dear; oh! dear,” she said, trying to run out of the room, but Mrs Inglis stopped her, and insisted upon knowing what was the cause of her mirth.

“Oh, ’M, please, ’M, here’s Mr Jones come, and wants to see Master; and oh, ’M, please, ’M—he—he—he—he—he—he’s in such a mess. Oh! dear; oh! dear; what shall I do!”

“Do,” said Mrs Inglis, at last, quite angrily. “Why, go and ask Mr Jones to step in here; or no, tell him to step into the drawing-room.”

“Oh, please, ’M, don’t,” said Mary, serious in a moment. “Please, ’M, don’t; he ain’t fit, and he’ll come off black over everything he comes a-nigh.”

“Well, send him here, then,” said Mrs Inglis; and away went Mary back into the hall, and directly after she ushered in Mr Jones, who presented such an appearance that both Mr and Mrs Inglis at once excused poor Mary’s laughter, for they had hard work to restrain their own mirth.

Mr Jones was a retired exciseman, and of the description of man known as dapper; he was a little, fat, chubby fellow, who dressed very smartly, always wearing white trousers in the summer, and a buff waistcoat, made so as to show as much shirt-front and as little waistcoat as possible. He was a man who always used to labour under, the idea that he looked very fierce, and, to make himself look fiercer, he used to brush his hair all up into a pyramid over the barren place on the top of his head, so that the hair used to form a regular pomatumed spike. But he did not look at all fierce, for his fat round face, dull eyes, and tenchy mouth would not let him; but he used to speak very loudly, and thump his Malacca cane down on the ground, and strut and look as important as many more people do who have not brains enough to teach them their insignificance as parts

of creation, or how very little value they are in the world, which could go on just as well without them.

Now, Mr Jones did not like Mr Inglis; he used to say that Mr Inglis was pompous, and purse-proud, and vain; and, what was more, Mr Inglis had given the little man dreadful offence in buying the two-acre field where the potato piece was that used to be so trampled down.

But I have been keeping Mr Jones waiting, for I said, a little way back, that Mary ushered him into the study, and Mr and Mrs Inglis could hardly keep from laughing; for a droll appearance did Mr Jones present as he strutted into the room, with his hat on, but seeing Mrs Inglis there, he took it off, and made a most pompous bow. But he did not look in bowing trim, his face, buff waistcoat, and shirt, presenting a currant-dumpling appearance rather ludicrous to gaze upon, for they were specked and spotted all over; while his white duck trousers, far above his knees, were dyed of a pitchy black hue, and covered with abominably smelling black mud.

"Now, sir," said Mr Jones; "pray, sir, what have you to say to this, sir?"

"Nothing at all, Mr Jones," said Mr Inglis quietly. "But may I inquire why I am favoured with this visit?"

"Favoured, sir? Visit, sir? What the ten thousand furies do you mean, sir? Look at my trousers, sir. Do you see them, sir?"

"Of course I see them," said Mr Inglis, "and I am sorry to see that you have met with so unfortunate an accident; but pray what has it to do with me?"

"To do with you, sir?" shrieked Mr Jones; "why, you laid traps for me, sir; snares and pitfalls, sir; but I'll be recompensed, sir, if there's law in England, sir. I won't stand it, sir. I'll—I'll—I'll—I'll—Confound it, sir; you shall hear from my solicitor, sir."

And then the little man bounced out of the study, banging the door after him; thumped his stick down on the marble floor of the hall at every step, and strode out of the house, and along the gravel-walk, almost beside himself with passion; for he felt convinced that Mr Inglis had been the cause of his mishap. But Mr Inglis was as innocent as his companion, who replied to his interrogative gaze with a look of astonishment so ludicrous that they both laughed long and heartily.

At last Mr Inglis said—"It must be some trick those boys have played. I must find it out, or we shall be having no end of unpleasantness about it." And the Squire leaned back in his chair, and laughed till the tears stood in his eyes.

But all this while Mr Jones was fuming worse than ever, for he had passed old Sam, Philip, Harry and Fred, standing at the gate of the stable-yard, and no sooner did they catch sight of the strange figure advancing towards them, than they rushed off laughing at such a boisterous rate that Mr Jones felt as though he could have strangled them all.

And now it is only fair that the reader should know how it was that Mr Jones had got into such a pickle, for he certainly was in a very nasty mess indeed. Mr Jones, as I said before, had been very much annoyed because Squire Inglis purchased the little corner field; so, from a petty feeling of spite, he always made a point of walking across the corner, kicking down the bank, and treading heavily upon the young quickset plants. Now, of course the example set by such a big little man as Mr Jones, would be sure to find followers; and this was the case here,

for many of the boys of the village used to slip across as well. But on the evening previous to what has been above related, old Sam took his tools down with him, and had soon dug out a hole about three feet deep just in the centre of the field, and right in the middle of the track; he then borrowed an old tin pail from a cottage near, and filled the hole full of black mud from a filthy drain ditch, which ran along the backs of some of the cottages in the village street, the smell from which was so bad that Fred and his cousins kept their distance while the hole was being filled.

When the pit was about full, Sam carefully sprinkled it over with the earth he had dug out, till it looked like the surrounding surface, when he levelled the place all round, and made it all so much alike that, to the ineffable delight of the boys, he could hardly tell where the pitfall was exactly, and put one of his own feet in above the ankle. Harry fairly danced with delight, but, seeing that the old man was turning cross, he helped to cover the place again, and then they left the pail at the cottage, and walked back to the Grange. As for the people living close at hand, they were so much accustomed to seeing old Sam working in the field that they took no notice of what he was doing; so there the trap lay, all ready baited for the first man.

Now, it so happened that no one crossed the corner that night, as Sam could readily see when he went down directly after breakfast next morning, for all was just as he left it the night before; but Sam had not gone many yards on his way back, when whom should he meet but Mr Jones, looking very clean and dapper, and most terribly important. He scorned to take any notice of old Sam, but strode on his way till he came to the potato piece, when he deliberately crossed the little dry ditch, trod down the tiny hedge, and then sticking his nose up in the air, as much as to say, "I'll teach old Inglis to stop up old tracks," he stamped along more pompously than ever, while Sam stopped by a turn in the road and watched him with eyes that seemed fascinated, so eagerly did they follow the old excise officer.

"Stamp—stamp," went the pompous little man; and "brog—brog," went his stick in the soft earth. "He'll miss it," said Sam to himself, for Mr Jones had apparently reached the centre of the field, and turned round to look about him, walking backwards. "Dear, dear," said Sam, "if he only would—"

"Plosh!" went Mr Jones right in backwards; and "spatter" went the foul mud all over his face and shirt-front, and then the poor little man tried to scramble out, but slipped in again, making himself worse than ever; but his next effort was more successful; and when Sam saw him standing amongst the potatoes looking all piebald, his heart was joyful within him, as he hurried home to tell the boys the success of their plot.

Mr Inglis very soon learned from the boys what was the cause of Mr Jones's visit, and for the moment he felt rather disposed to be cross; but on looking at the laughing eyes before him, and the mirthful countenance of Mrs Inglis, he was obliged to join in the merriment himself; for as Philip very sagely remarked,—"You know, papa, he had no business there." As for Mr Jones, he was nearly red-hot with fury when he reached home, for he had been laughed at by more than one person on his way; so when the door was opened, and his pet dog—a disagreeable terrier—came smelling about his legs, his master kicked him savagely, upon which

the dog retorted by sticking his teeth into his assailant's leg, and then running off howling as loudly as he could.

Mr Jones then set to work and washed himself, a process of which he stood greatly in need; and by the time he had made himself dapper again, he felt cooler and more comfortable; and he also began to wish he had not told Mr Inglis that he should hear from his solicitor. But he had told him to, and therefore he felt that he must go to his solicitor at once, or he would very soon have made up his mind to say no more about it. So off Mr Jones trotted to his lawyer; that is to say, his pony trotted, carrying Mr Jones in the little chaise, in which was a carefully tied-up bundle containing the blackened and damaged suit of clothes, which looked worse than ever by the time he reached the town, for the trousers had communicated a vast amount of their filth to the waistcoat and shirt-front, not forgetting to administer their odour at the same time. When Mr Jones arrived at the lawyer's he found him at home, and was soon closeted with him in his mouldy room, all amongst the dust, papers, parchments, and tin boxes; and then and there Mr Jones told his tale, and finished by drawing out the black garments, for there was very little white to be seen on the trousers.

"But you did not tell me where the pitfall was made," said Mr De Vellum, the solicitor.

"Made, sir?" said Mr Jones excitedly; "why, in that corner piece of land, where the road makes the sharp turn, on the other side of the village."

"What, where the finger-post stands at the corner?"

"To be sure," said Mr Jones; "the very place."

"Well, but," said Mr De Vellum, "that's the piece Mr Inglis bought at the sale last year, when I bid for you."

"Just so," said Mr Jones; "I was walking across it, as I have done hundreds of times before."

"Ah!" said Mr De Vellum, "but it has been enclosed, and you know, my dear sir, you were trespassing. Let me order in a glass of wine," he continued, for Mr Jones had luckily come for advice to a sensible man; "let me order in a glass of wine, and then I'll give you my advice."

The wine was brought in, and then Mr Jones received his advice, which cost him six shillings and eightpence, but would have been cheap at a guinea, for the advice was to go home and take no more notice of the matter.

Mr Jones was quite cool when he heard the solicitor's opinion; and it was so much in agreement with his own, that he immediately shook hands, said "good-day," and made the best of his way home.

Chapter 21

Catching Tartars.

MR JONES used to have a man, who was a jobbing gardener, come once a week "to put him a bit straight," as the man called it; and this gardener used sometimes

to meet old Sam at the Red Lion, when they would have a pint of beer together, and compare cabbages and gooseberries; talk about peas and plums; and relate how many snails they had each killed, by putting salt on their tails, during the past week. Now, it so happened that Sam went to the Red Lion on the very night that closed in upon the day when Mr Jones muddied his white trousers; and it also so happened that Ikey Fogger, the jobbing gardener, thought that he too should like a half-pint at the Red Lion. The consequence was, that the two tillers of the soil began to compare notes, and very soon the history of Mr Jones's misfortune was talked over, and so heartily laughed at by every one present, that old Sam grew quite proud of the feat; and at last let out that Master Harry and he had done it, and it "sarved old Jones right."

Next morning, Ikey Fogger was putting Mr Jones's garden "a bit straight," which was done by means of the rake, scythe, hoe, spade, and broom, when Mr Jones came out to superintend as usual, for he had his own particular way of having things done; and in the course of the conversation that followed, Ikey Fogger told him what had been said at the Red Lion by old Sam; the fruit of which was that Ikey had an extra sixpence to "drink master's health," and Mr Jones sat down in his best parlour to see whether he could not devise some plan of attack upon Harry and the other boys,—for he considered all bad alike,—so as to enjoy what he called the "sweets of vengeance."

Just then he happened to look up and see the three boys, accompanied by their dog, go strolling past on the other side of the road, when a thought struck him which he hastened to put into execution.

The boys were going out for a stroll till tea-time, for they scarcely knew what to do with themselves, having no particular object in view, one and all having declared it too hot for cricket. They therefore loosened the dog, and went off to see what would turn up in the way of amusement. They strolled past the end of the village, and down a lane that led to a bend of the river, and at last sat down upon the bank, and amused themselves by throwing sticks and stones in the water for the dog to fetch out,—a feat, by the way, that he never accomplished, for he was not well broken in to the task. He would run in fast enough, and pretend to make a dash at the stick or stone, but that was all he did, save bark and yelp as he stood up to his middle in the water. At last they grew tired of even this effort, for the heat made them languid and idle; so they sprawled about on the grass, lazily watching the flies that skimmed about and flitted over the surface of the water in such rapid motion that they looked like strings of flies.

All at once there was a splash in the river close to their feet.

"There's a great fish," said Fred.

"It was a stone, I think," said Philip.

"But who was to have thrown it?" said Harry; "there's no one about."

Just then a great stone splashed up the water, and another struck the poor dog such a blow upon the head that it gave a sharp howl, and rolled right down the bank into the river, from whence it crawled with its eye swelling up fast, and a cut in the skin bleeding profusely.

The boys now saw that the stones were thrown from behind a hedge on the right, and three more came directly, one of which hit Philip a smart blow in the

back and made him wince again. Just then three big lads made their appearance, and began to pick up more stones.

"Let's run," said Fred, "or we shall be hurt."

"Yes, come along," said Philip, rubbing his back and twisting with pain.

"No, I shan't run," said Harry; "the cowards have half killed poor Dick, or I'd set him at them. I know who they are,—there's Bill Jenkins, and the two Stapleses. Don't I wish I was bigger, I'd give it them;" and Harry ground his teeth together, and clenched his fists tightly.

"Yah; yah-ha; go home!" shouted the assailants. But Harry wouldn't budge an inch, but stooped down and began to tie his pocket handkerchief round the dog's bleeding head.

"Yah-ah! yah-ah-ah-ah; go home wi' yer!" shouted the lads again, running up, evidently meaning to chevy the Grange boys away; and this seemed an easy task, for the new-comers were all bigger and stronger. "Yah-ah-ah-ah; go home!" they shouted again; and then one, who seemed to be the leader, said to his comrades,—"Let's pitch the dog in, come on."

"You'd better not touch him, Bill Jenkins," said Harry, turning very white, either with fear or rage. "We did not interfere with you, so leave us alone."

"Yah-ah-ah-ah; go home with yer!" shouted the boys again, for this seemed to be a kind of battle-cry with which they warmed themselves to attack the inoffensive party. Philip half-screwed himself behind Harry, while Fred, who felt dreadfully alarmed, stood behind Philip.

"Let us go home quietly, please," said Fred, "and I'll give you a shilling."

"Give us the shilling, then," said the boy called Jenkins, who, upon its being produced, snatched it away from Fred, put it in his pocket, and then laid hold of the dog's hind leg and dragged it towards the river.

"You let him go now, come," whimpered Harry.

"Wow—wow—wow—wow—wow—wow," said the boys, mocking Harry's whimper, and in another moment poor Dick would have been plunged in, when Harry, pushing back one of the Stapleses, who tried to stop him, planted such a well-directed blow in Bill Jenkins's ear that he dropped the dog in a moment, and shook his head as though something was buzzing inside it, as no doubt there was, for the blow was a smart one, Master Harry having had boxing gloves on more than once at school.

But this was the signal for a combined attack from the enemy upon Harry, who struck out manfully, but was getting terribly knocked about, when Philip dashed into the fray, and relieved his brother of one assailant. But two were too many for Harry, and seeing Fred doing nothing, he shouted to him for help.

Poor Fred! He felt terribly alarmed, and would gladly have run away; but he saw Philip punching away at his adversary like a Trojan, while Harry, with the blood streaming down his face, was being beaten back step by step towards the river by his two formidable opponents. This was too much for Fred, who threw off his cap and jacket and then crept cautiously up to try and aid his cousin, who was getting rapidly worsted. Now Fred afterwards confessed that he felt dreadfully alarmed, and Bill Jenkins evidently saw this, and tried to frighten him away; but he went the wrong way to work, for as Fred came timidly up, Bill swung round one of his long arms, and gave the new-comer a back-handed smack in his mouth that made

the blood spurt out in a moment, and then, by a clever thrust of his leg, tripped him up so that he lay sprawling on the grass. But this blow, instead of frightening the town-bred lad, knocked all the fear out of him; for, to Bill Jenkins's great astonishment, he leapt up as though made of springs, and dashed at him like a fury.

From that moment, Harry had only one enemy to deal with, for Bill Jenkins began to find that he was getting such a thrashing as he never before had in his life. Fred's fists battered him about the face like a shower of blows, and in the scuffles that ensued the big lad was more than once completely knocked off his feet. He had very soon had enough of it, and began to show it; but Fred had not, for he warmed with the fray, and, in spite of the other's cries for quarter, hammered and battered away at him with greater fury than ever, till at last they closed together, wrestled backwards, forwards, this way, that way, and at last, seizing his opportunity, Fred gave a regular spring off the ground, and drove his enemy backwards, but, as it happened, not on to the ground, but dash, splash into the river, where they both sank, but came up again directly, Bill Jenkins roaring for help, and Fred holding on to him like a tiger.

This put an end to the fight, for the fall into the river and conquest of their leader made the two Stapleses take to their heels, so that Harry and Philip were at liberty to help Fred, which they did, by dragging Bill Jenkins half-drowned from the river, for Fred, in his anger, had kept him under water more than once; and then all three kicked him rather unmercifully to bring him well to again; and it must be said, in mitigation of this rather barbarous proceeding, that the blood of the conquerors was a little up, and they were in that state in which we hear of soldiers being when they sack and burn towns.

But Bill Jenkins was thoroughly thrashed—thoroughly—for he lay on the grass and blubbered like a great cowardly calf as he was. He did not say, "Yah-ah-ah-ha," now, but "boo-hoo-hoo-hooed" dreadfully; and at last came out—

"We shouldn't ha' touched you if that genelman hadn't given us a shilling each to pay you at out."

"What gentleman?" said Harry.

"Why, him as lives at the little house yonder, the little fat man, Muster Jones, hoo—hoo—ooh—ooh," said Bill, who with his swelled eyes and wet hair now looked a beauty, not that the conquerors had anything to boast of in that respect. "Now, then," said Fred, viciously; "you give me my shilling back, or I'll give you another ducking."

"Boo—hoo," said Bill, refunding the cash very reluctantly, and ducking his head as though to avoid a blow.

"Ah! you deserve it, you great coward," said Harry. "Now get up, and be off home; and don't you meddle with us again."

And so these young cocks crowed, for the day was regularly their own; while Bill Jenkins sneaked off, with his feathers draggling down about his sides, and with bitterness in his heart, for he knew that another thrashing was in waiting for him at home, for getting his clothes wet, and his face bruised.

And now that the victors had the field entirely to themselves, and the excitement was over, they began to find that they were all very stiff and sore; and upon looking at one another, they found that the victory had been dearly bought

Fred had, after all, been the greatest hero, and, as a matter of course, he had come in for the greatest amount of damage: his clothes were soaked with water; his shirt stained with blood; his collar torn off; but; as to personal damage, he had escaped with a cut mouth and bleeding knuckles, for he had found that Bill Jenkins possessed a terribly thick head. Harry's clothes were terribly dragged about, and his knuckles were in nearly as bad a state as Fred's, while his face was in such a condition that Philip said he might pass for somebody else. Poor boy, he was sadly "punished," as sporting people call it, while more matter-of-fact folks would say, "knocked about:" the general appearance of his face was such that it might have been supposed that he had been the combatant who was immersed in the water, and that, having stayed in too long, his face had swelled and grown puffy. Philip had a nasty cut on the ear, and had had his nose flattened, but it had regained its proper position, though not without deluging him with blood. Altogether, the boys unmistakeably bore the appearances of having been in a sharp engagement; and, as the sailors say, they "hove to" for the purpose of repairing damages.

The first proceeding was to wring all the water out of Fred's clothes, and then, when he had put on his dry jacket and cap,—which he had flung off on commencing the conflict,—he did not look so very, very bad. Philip, too, was made pretty decent, when he had taken his stained collar off, and buttoned his waistcoat up with the collar reversed, so that it covered his shirt. But Harry was the worst, for he looked dreadful; and no amount of bathing would make him decent. To begin with, his cap would not go on so as to cover his bruised forehead; his eyes were reduced to narrow slits, so that he could scarcely see; while his mouth was drawn down all on one side.

"Only look what an old gutta-percha head," said Philip; "don't he seem as if some one had been squeezing him out of shape?" And then all three burst out laughing, till Harry begged of them not to make him laugh.

"Oh, don't, Phil; it does hurt so."

"I say," said Fred, "however are we to go in to tea?"

"I don't know," said Philip; "I don't know what they will say to us! But we had better go home at once. What a set of guys we look! Let's go along by the river side, and get over the palings into the fields, and then, perhaps, we can slip in without being seen."

"Come along then," said Harry, "for I do feel so stupid, and I can't see a bit."

"Oh! let's make haste," said Fred, "for wet clothes are not at all comfortable."

It was getting on fast for tea-time, so they hurried along, and having, by means of jumping a couple of ditches, reached the palings which skirted Mr Inglis's property, they helped Harry over, and crept along close to the trees. It had been no joke for Harry to leap the ditches, for he had to do it standing, but he managed to get pretty well over, and then blundered along behind his brother and cousin.

"Now, then, keep close, Harry," whispered Philip, when they were in the garden; "keep close, and we'll soon slip in."

Harry did keep close, and Philip dodged behind all the evergreens and clumps that he could till they had only one great Portugal laurel to pass round, and then they could reach the side-door. Half a minute more would have settled it, when

one of the French windows opened, and out stepped Mr and Mrs Inglis just in front of the trio.

Mrs Inglis's face expressed the horror and compassion that she felt to see the boys in such a state, and, without stopping to ask questions, they were hurried in, and nursed and doctored into a state that made them a little more presentable at the tea-table, round which, when they were assembled, Mr Inglis listened to the recital of the conflict; and, much as he was annoyed at the not very creditable affair, still he could not see how the lads could have acted differently. It was a thing that he could not praise them for, and he did not wish to blame; so he contented himself that night with pointing out the folly of playing such practical jokes as had been schemed by Harry, saying that, however wrong others might behave, retaliation in any shape ought not to be thought of.

"But I say, Pa," said Harry, "you would not have had us stand still and let those fellows knock poor Dick about, would you?"

"Come, boys," said Mr Inglis, "it's quite time you went off to bed, particularly after such a day as you have had."

The boys said "good night," and went off to their bedrooms, and as soon as they were out of hearing, Mr Inglis turned to his wife, and said—

"That last question was unanswerable, my dear, for duty said 'Yes,' while my heart said 'No.' The young dogs! What a knocking about they've got; but I expect that their opponents are in a worse position still. I've been thinking of taking proceedings against this Jones, for really this is such a flagrant affair; but, after all, perhaps we had better treat the matter with the contempt it deserves."

What more Mr Inglis would have said I cannot tell, for he was interrupted by the stuffy-looking head of Harry being thrust into the room, and a voice that must have been his, though the lips were immovable, saying—

"I say, Pa, you ain't very cross, are you?"

Harry was started off to bed again, and Mr Inglis turned to his books, so that the question was not discussed any more.

Chapter 22

Fire! Fire! Fire!

THE DAYS slipped pleasantly by, and the boys had nearly lost all traces of their unpleasant encounter. They had been fishing again at the mill, and had a long talk with Dusty Bob, who had promised to make them some namesakes, namely "bobs" for eel-catching in the dam, and they were to be ready on the Wednesday evening following. This was Tuesday, and after a hot day, during which they had been having fine sport in the field—where the men were getting in a lateish crop of hay-making hay huts, and then when the abode was tenanted, knocking it down upon the unfortunate inhabitant, who by this means was half smothered, which Harry said constituted the best part of the fun—a kind of fun that Fred could not see, for the view he took of the matter was like that of the pelted frogs in the fable,

and after being covered up with a mass of hay, and having had Harry and Philip sitting on the top of that, he had crawled out at last very hot, stuffy, bitty, and uncomfortable, and could not be persuaded to enter the hay hut again.

The boys had worked hard in the field; turning the hay, making it into cocks, tossing them out, and then helping to load the waggon, and taking the high-piled load to the stack-yard—the part the boys managed in taking the load being that of riding on the top amidst the sweet-scented new hay, and having to lie flat down as the mass passed beneath the tall gateway and under the granary into the yard. On the way back, Harry rode the leading horse, making stirrups of the traces, while his legs stuck out at a very obtuse angle one from the other, in consequence of the round back of the fat cart-horse.

Harry was the most venturesome of the three boys in all things, and yet, in spite of his daring, he met with fewer mishaps than the others; however, on this particular day, he did have the pleasure of being run away with, for, after taking a load to the stack, the front horse was always unhooked from the traces, and allowed to follow the waggon behind. Now upon this occasion, after re-entering the field, Ball, the big horse, must have been tickled by a fly, or else have had the idea that, now a gentleman was on his back, instead of being a cart-horse he was a hunter. However, let the horse's idea have been what it might, he whisked his tail, kicked up his heels, tossed his head, and snorted; and then went off in a regular elephant gallop down the field, with all the men shouting "Stop him—stop him," but nobody trying to do so in the least. As for Harry, he stuck his knees into the horse as well as he could, and dragged at the rein, but he might just as well have pulled at a post for all the impression he made. He felt rather frightened, but he stuck tightly to his great steed, steadying himself by taking fast hold of the horse's great collar with one hand, all the while dragging with the other at the rein.

Away went the great brute full gallop, scattering the hay in all directions, and charging right down at the hedge at the bottom of the field.

"He'll stop there," shouted the men in pursuit, to one another.

But not a bit of it, for the horse took the hedge in a flying leap, and then went galloping on through the corn-field on the other side, and then he came to a stand-still right in the middle of the waving grain, and began to nibble off the green sweet ears.

But where was Harry? Why, sitting on the bank, with his legs swinging in the ditch by the side of the hedge over which the horse made such a splendid leap. But though the horse could make splendid leaps, Harry could not, for he was not used to hunting, and the first sensation he felt after flying through the air over the hedge, was that of a rude bump upon the earth, in the midst of a bed of stinging-nettles. He got up, shook himself, and felt his legs and arms to see if anything was broken, and then, finding that such was not the case, he began rubbing his back and then applying dock leaves to his stung hands.

There must have been a good deal of elasticity in Harry's bones, for, somehow or other, in cases where other persons would have had theirs broken, Harry's seemed only to have bent and returned to their normal position. So by the time the men came up to the hedge, Harry was sitting very unconcernedly with his legs swinging in the ditch, rubbing in the dock juice upon the stung places with all his might.

“Here he bes,” said a voice, and the great brown face of one of the carters peered over the hedge. “Art t’e hurt, Maester Harry?”

“No: not I,” said Harry, getting up, “Jump over and catch that old wretch. What made him run away with me?”

But the carter could not answer that question, so he tried to catch the horse; but the first step was to get over the hedge, which he could not manage so easily as the horse. He tried in two or three places, but it was of no use, for the live fence was of the thorniest and thickest, so he had to go round about a quarter of a mile to the gate, and then set to to catch the truant. But this too was easier said than done, for the horse found himself in very pleasant quarters, and refused to leave them; there was the sweetest of pasture all round him in the shape of juicy, milky, corn-ears; the long green stems would have made a pleasant resting-place, and then there were the larks carolling above him, and the white-throats and yellow-hammers twittering on all sides; while the sun shone warmly enough to make work tedious and repose delightful; so that altogether the horse did not feel disposed to return to his hard bondage of drawing the hay waggon, so heavily laden that he had to put out all his strength to draw it over the soil yielding surface of the field; and he showed this as plainly as he could by refusing to “come then.” He wouldn’t “come then” a bit, but turned his tail to all the blandishments offered to his notice. It was of no use to pretend that there was corn in your hand, for he would not believe it, and would not even smell to see. The carter might run as fast as he liked, but this did not answer, for it trampled the corn down, and besides, the horse had four legs to the carter’s two, and easily beat him at running, even when he was dodged up into a corner of the field, for he dashed along in the ditch and so escaped again into the centre.

“Whoa, then, whoa-oa-oa,” said the carter, quite out of breath with his efforts. But the horse wouldn’t “whoa” any more than he would “come then,” but trotted off for a short distance, and then very coolly commenced grazing upon the green corn-ears. At last the carter thought of what he should have thought of at first, namely, leaving the gate open, and trying to drive the horse through. This he accomplished by means of a little manoeuvring, and the truant returned to the farm-yard, where he was easily captured, and where he obtained a severe flogging for his vagaries.

That same night the boys lay in bed talking through the open doorway about what they would do in the morning, when a light flashed upon the window-blind.

“How it lightens!” said Fred. “There, again, did you see that?”

His cousins had seen what he alluded to, and said so; but the light appeared upon their blind again, and this time lasted so long, that they got out of bed to look, when, to their horror, they could see flames running up the side of a great wheat-stack in the farm-yard, and the blaze every moment growing larger. They ran to the stairs and shouted the alarm to Mr Inglis, who saw by the glare that shone through the hall window what was the matter, and hurried out.

The boys scrambled on their clothes as quickly as possible, and upon going out, found Mrs Inglis and all the maids upon the lawn, watching the progress of the flames, which spread with alarming rapidity.

Mr Inglis’s farm-yard was situated fully a hundred yards from the house, so that there was no danger upon that side, and, besides, the wind was very still, which

prevented the flames spreading so fast as they would have done. But, unfortunately, the stacks and farm-buildings were very close together, so that it seemed very probable that the whole of the contents of the yard would fall a prey to the flames.

When the boys reached the yard, they found everything in confusion—people running up from the villages; then shouting, and ordering, and contradicting, all in a breath, and everybody in a state of the greatest excitement. The only cool person about the place seemed to be Mr Inglis, who had already despatched a mounted messenger to the town for the engine, and was now forming a line of men from the pond to the stack nearest the fire, over which, by means of ladders, a great corn sheet was laid, and this they tried to keep wet. The pails were passed quickly along, and returned empty by another row of men; but the burning stack roared and crackled, and the sparks flew up in myriads, while in the glare of light the martins and swallows could be seen flitting backwards and forwards over the flames, till one by one the poor things were suffocated, and dropped into the burning mass. An old white owl, too, showed itself, flapping its wings round the burning stack and hooting dismally, but it soon after flew off and was lost in the dark night.

The men worked hard at keeping the sheet wet, but it was of no avail, for all at once a great portion of the burning stack tell down against the one they were trying to save, and in a few minutes the great sheet and the whole of the side of the stack beneath it were in a blaze.

Mr Inglis now directed his attention to the stables at the rear, towards which the flames were travelling with inconceivable velocity, the ground being nearly covered with loose straw, across which the flames ran like wildfire. Upon running to the stable-door he found it locked, and in the crowd and confusion the horse-keeper could not be found. There was not a moment to lose, for the roof was already on fire, so a fir pole was fetched, and used battering-ram fashion, so that the big door by a few strokes was sent off its hinges. Mr Inglis then rushed in and found the place full of smoke, and the poor horses trembling with fear. There were eight in the stable, and to cut their halters was but the work of a minute. Some of them dashed out of the place as soon as released, as though mad with fear; while others stood with dripping sides, snorting and shuddering, and had literally to be dragged out.

All this while the roof was blazing away rapidly, and the hay in the loft served to make it burn more fiercely. Seven horses had been saved, but the eighth stubbornly refused to move, in spite of every effort; and at last Mr Inglis and the men with him were compelled to retreat to avoid suffocation.

Upon being a little restored, one of the men would have made another attempt, but he was stopped by Mr Inglis, who said that it would be a risk of human life that he would not allow. Just then the roof fell in with a crash, and a fearful shriek burst from the poor animal that met with so horrible a death, while the men shuddered as they looked at one another, and thought of their narrow escape.

The farm-yard now presented a dreadful scene of confusion, for poultry, pigs, and calves were running about in all directions, adding their cries to the general clamour; the pigeons flew round the place and from building to building; and

everything seemed disposed to fly or run in any but the direction required of it; the men, too, appeared nearly as bad, running hither and thither without aim or purpose, and getting into danger when there was not the slightest necessity.

And now the flames roared and crackled terribly, and seemed to have gained the entire mastery. The moon had not risen, so that the dark night was lit up by the red glare, and the tall elm and beech-trees turned of a golden green as they reflected the bright light. The flames leaped from stack to stack, and from shed to shed, licking everything up, and seeming to laugh at the efforts which were made to stay their progress. The great barn full of corn was in a blaze, and the fear seemed to be that the farm-house where Mr Inglis's bailiff lived would be the next prey of the flames. The pig-sties were all burnt down, and two unfortunate fat pigs had perished, squealing dismally; but the rest of the live stock had been saved, as also most of the farming implements: drills, ploughs, harrows, harness, carts, waggons, etc, etc, had been all dragged out of the way; but, for all that, the loss of valuable stock was terrible—unthreshed ricks of barley, oats, and wheat; hay and straw, a barn filled with sacks of grain newly threshed, and all being devoured by the flames in one short hour and a half.

The great barn was blazing furiously, and the tired men busily engaged wetting the thatch upon the gable end of the farm-house, upon which great flakes of fire kept falling; while others were hard at work dragging the furniture out of the doors and windows, and bearing it to a place of safety, when there was heard a distant "hurray," and then came the pattering sound of galloping horses, and the rattle of wheels. The cheering was taken up by those near at hand, and in the midst of the shouting, the dark red body of the engine from Marshford dashed up to the yard. In a twinkling, the horses were detached by the men in dark uniform who had leaped off the engine, the glare all the while reflected from their brass-bound helmets—for Marshford boasted a volunteer fire brigade—and then the wheels spun round again as the engine was run down to the pond, the suction pipe screwed on, and like magic, so quickly was it done, length after length of hose joined together, till a sufficiency was obtained to reach easily the burning barn; and then the captain with the burnished copper branch screwed it to the hose, men seized the handles on each side of the engine, and at the given word—"Thud—thud; thud—thud; thud—thud," went the powerful pumps. "Squish—squitter—squish—squish—ciss—ciss—hiss-s-s-s-s-s," went a stream of water swift as an arrow from a bow right on to the gable of the farm-house, and deluging the thatch in a moment, from the broad red chimney-stack down to the eaves, and extinguishing every spark and flake that hung to it. How necessary this had become could be seen from the steam which arose from the thatch, which must have been in flames in a few minutes, while the brickwork actually hissed, it had grown so heated.

An occasional dash from the branch soon stayed all alarm as to the farm-house being in danger, and the captain, directing his stream of water against the burning barn, ordered his men to attach another hose-pipe and branch to the engine, so as to double the stream of water thrown upon the flames; this was soon done, and it being evident that nothing would avail to stay the progress of the fire in the ricks and sheds, which were one mass of red glow, both branches were devoted to the attack upon the big barn.

How the men cheered and pumped; and how the sweat streamed down their faces as they sent the handles down on each side, “thud—thud; thud—thud;” and how the streams of water dashed into the burning building, battling with the forked tongues of the fire, inch by inch, and turning the glowing timbers into black, smoking, charred masses; while volumes of steam and smoke now ascended where all before was flame. “Hiss—hiss—hiss,” went the raging flames as the cold streams interposed between these fiery dragons and their prey; and “ciss—ciss—ciss,” rushed the water sputtering from the copper tubes the captain of the brigade and his lieutenant held in their hands. Famously was the engine kept going, for a barrel of beer was brought down, and the men relieved each other, and partook of the refreshing draughts handed to them from the cask.

All at once there was a warning cry, and a hurried rush of many feet, for ore of the great corn-ricks, which had burned to the very core, had toppled over, spreading its glowing ashes right across the yard, and a shower of sparks high up in the air, like a golden whirlwind, setting fire to the loose straw that lay about in all directions. But for the presence of the engine, the fire would now have spread in another direction; but the powerful streams of water that were dashed all over the place soon extinguished the many little fires that had sprung up, and Mr Inglis leading on a body of men with buckets to throw water where it would have good effect, the engine branches were directed again at the large barn, which was greatly in need of attention, for during the brief pause the flames had leaped up with renewed violence; but the steady streams of water soon began to tell upon them, and that too so well, that in the course of an hour, one branch was considered enough to finish the task of extinguishing the fire in that building, and the other poured an unintermitting stream upon each and every part of the yard where the flames were.

The danger of the ruin spreading was now entirely at an end; and every minute the glare became duller and fainter. The “clank-clank: thud-thud” of the engine still kept on hour after hour, for the smouldering heaps of ashes every now and then burst out into flame; but a shower from the branches soon reduced its brightness to a cloud of steam and smoke. The day had long dawned, and at last up rose the sun upon the scene of devastation, and a sad sight it was, and the more so from the whispers abroad that it was the work of some evil-minded person, who, for reasons of his own, had set fire to the stacks; but happily this afterwards proved not to have been the case, for the fire was the result of an accident: a tramp, who had lain down in the straw to sleep, having dropped the match with which he lit his pipe, when the dry straw caught fire, and the flames ran up the side of the stack by his side in a few seconds.

It was indeed a sad sight, for all around lay sodden and blackened straw, charred beams, and smoking rafters, half-burnt boards, scorched sacks; in short, it was a scene of ruin, and the smoke and steam ascended in clouds towards the bright morning sky. An occasional dash from the branch was now sufficient to keep the fire under, and the greater part of the worn and jaded working people, after partaking of refreshments at the Grange kitchen, went home to snatch a few hours’ rest, and among those who went to seek rest were Mr Inglis and the boys. But on entering the house they found the blinds open, and the breakfast cloth

spread, so that they all sat down to a refreshing meal; after which everybody declared that it would be a pity to go to bed on so bright a morning.

Fred seemed, however, to have something on his mind; and at last stammeringly asked his uncle if this disaster would not prove a serious loss. His fears, however, were set at rest by Mr Inglis, who smiled, and told him that it would have been, but for the exercise of prudence and forethought, for, said he—

"If I had not been insured, it would have been a much more terrible affair; but now the insurance company will either pay me the full value of everything that has been destroyed by way of compensation, or build up the whole of my barns and fill them again, so that you see I shall have new ones instead of old."

"But they can't build a new horse and pigs again," said Harry.

"No, poor creatures," said Mr Inglis; "that was a sad death for them. However, we have the satisfaction of knowing that we did our best to save them."

"But what is insurance?" inquired Fred.

"Why, to explain it simply," said Mr Inglis, "a body of men join together, and pay each of them a small sum of money yearly into a place of business, which they have in London; and then, when anybody who belongs to them has a misfortune, and his place is burnt, he has, from this money that has been paid up in littles, enough sent to him to pay for all the damage that has been done. Some people keep on paying in all their lifetime, and never have a misfortune, and so that money goes to help those who have. Thus in my time I have never had a mishap of this kind before, but have been paying year after year, for a very long time, and what I have paid has gone to help those who have been in trouble; now my turn has come, and I shall write to London to the people who manage, when they will send down a gentleman to see what is the amount of damage done, and then they will pay me the money at once, or, perhaps, repair the damages. So you see, my boy, there is nothing like prudence and foresight, not only in guarding against fire, but in all things."

Chapter 23

A broken Day.

IN SPITE of the resolution to sit up as it had grown so late, the boys did not seem at all the thing: there was a great disposition to yawn, and a general feeling of being uncomfortable. Things appeared strange and irregular, and the events of the past night to have taken place a long time back; and at last, by the advice of Mrs Inglis, they all three went off to bed—the dinner being put off till a later hour.

As for Mr Inglis, he was busy enough in the farm-yard till dinner-time, for, in the present state of confusion, it was impossible to tell what amount of damage was done, and what had been saved from the flames. Implements and tools were spread about in all directions, and the extent of the ruin almost put him in a state of despair; but he reflected that the misfortune might have been of a far more serious nature, and then set to work busier than ever.

By twelve o'clock the engine had gone back to the town, the fire being completely extinct; and then there were arrangements to make for the horses, pigs, cows, and poultry, all of which required immediate attention; for, although Mr Inglis kept a manager or bailiff to attend to his farm, yet, in such a case of emergency as the present, he found plenty to call for his own aid.

About three o'clock the boys made their appearance again, well refreshed with the five or six hours' sleep they had taken; but the whole place looked so desolate and miserable, that they very soon scampered off into the garden, to amuse themselves with a few strawberries and gooseberries. When they had had enough fruit, they took some into the green-house for the parrot, who made a noise like the smacking of lips upon being shown the strawberries, which she seemed to enjoy wonderfully; while as for the gooseberries, they were capital amusement, for she picked the seeds out of the pulp one at a time, and then danced up and down as though in ecstasy.

But they were soon tired of playing with Poll, and betook themselves to the yard to tease the old raven; but he was not in a mood to be teased, so showed fight, and pecked viciously at every one who came near him, till at last, feeling that might would eventually overcome right, and the boys prove too much for him, he took to his old place of refuge, the horse-chestnut tree, where he sat and barked and laughed at his late aggressors.

They next turned their attention to Dick, who had not had a run since the day when he had his eye cut by the stone thrown by Bill Jenkins's party. The cut was healed up; and very soon Dick was capering round the yard in fine style, but somehow or other his capers did not give satisfaction to his masters; they wanted something new, and they could find nothing fresh to amuse them, till all at once the yard gate opened, and a lad appeared with a letter in his hand.

"Wow—wow—wuff," said Dick, making at the intruder open-mouthed, but the new-comer was too quick for the dog, for he darted back, and shut the gate in his face.

Back darted Dick, and out at the door at the other end, and then round by the shrubbery.

Harry and Philip both tried to open the gate, but the new-comer—whom they had recognised as Fred's late adversary, Bill Jenkins, was holding on tightly, so that they could not move it in the least. But in the course of a few seconds there was the sound of rushing feet through the shrubbery; a loud yell; and then the gate was released, and upon being opened there stood, or rather reeled about, Bill Jenkins, and Dick, who owed him a grudge for the stone-throwing, tight hold of him by the trousers and shaking away at them as hard as he possibly could; and all the while snarling and growling as viciously as a dog could snarl and growl.

"Help! help!" roared Bill Jenkins.

"Worry—worry—worry," went Dick.

"Help! help! murder!" roared Bill Jenkins again; and then, tripping over a stone, he fell sprawling on the gravel-walk, when Dick, with all the importance of a conqueror, left his hold of the trousers and leaped upon the fallen enemy's breast, where he stood with his red tongue lolling out, and wagging his tail.

"Oh, please call him off; oh, do please," said Bill Jenkins; "I'll ne'er throw stones at him again. Oh, please call him off."

Harry laid hold of Dick's tail, and Philip took him by the ears, and they carried him off to the yard and chained him up again, when he set to barking as loudly as he could, until his enemy had left the premises, which he did directly, leaving the letter, which he had brought for Mr Inglis, in the charge of Fred, and then slipping off, after faring no worse than being in a most horrible fright, for Dick's teeth went no farther than through his trousers. As to Harry and Philip, they enjoyed the fun, as they called it, immensely, which can hardly be wondered at when the provocation they had received is taken into consideration; but I must do them the credit of saying that they would not have set the dog at poor Bill, and that they could not have stopped him if they had tried ever so hard, which, in the hurry-skurry of the affair, they had no chance of attempting. Dick had a good memory for those who were kind, and those who behaved ill to him, as Bill Jenkins found to his cost; and never afterwards could he be persuaded to take a message to Mr Inglis's house, so wholesome was the dread with which the dog had inspired him.

This episode supplied the boys with what they had wanted—something to take up their attention till dinner-time, which Harry, by making a charge into the kitchen, found to be in the process of what Mrs Cook termed "dishing up;" so they entered the house, where they found Papa just going to relieve himself of a little of the black which clung to him; and soon afterwards, at dinner, they heard all that had been done to make the best of the existing state of affairs.

During tea the family party were again alarmed by the cry of "Fire!" of which they could see the glare through the window; but, on hastening to the farm-yard, it proved to be only one of the smouldering heaps which had burst out again, and a few pails of water soon extinguished the flames.

Watchmen were left in charge of the place, and soon after returning to the house, the whole of the inmates, thoroughly tired out with the excitement of the past twenty-four hours, retired to rest.

Chapter 24

Beware of the Snake.

"NOW, BOYS," said Philip, "tumble up—tumble up—tumble up, it's such a beautiful morning. Come, get up, Harry," he continued, giving his brother a rough shake.

"Aw—yaw—aw—aw—aw—aw," said Harry, gaping fearfully.

"Get up-p-p-p-p-p," shouted Philip again, giving him another shake.

"Oh, don't, Philip," said Harry, "I'm so slee-aw-aw-aw-ah-aw-aw-py."

"What an old stupid!" said Philip again. "If you don't get up, I'll cold sponge you."

Harry did not wait for the cold sponge, but got up at once, and then the young dogs seemed to enter into a compact to disturb the rest of poor Fred, which they did by torturing him most ingeniously.

Fred was lying fast asleep, and, the night having been warm, he had kicked all the clothes off, so Harry and Philip collected the hair-brushes in the two bedrooms, which, old and new, amounted to five; after which, Harry slipped down into the hall, and brought up the two clothes-brushes, and these they carefully arranged upon the bed, all on one side of the sleeper. They next screwed up the corner of a handkerchief, and began to tickle him on the side farthest from the brushes. The first application of the tickler produced an impatient rub; the second, an irritable scratch; but the third made the sleeper turn right over on to the sharp brushes, and begin to curl and twist about with pain.

"Oh, dear! what's—ah—ah—er—oh, dear—don't. What's in the bed?" said Fred, muttering and groaning and twisting amongst the brushes, but still keeping his eyes obstinately closed.

His tormentors roared with laughter; and it was this mirth which thoroughly aroused Fred to the comprehension of his position, which he no sooner realised than he sat up in bed, but in so doing only increased his pain—penetrating hair-brushes, although meant expressly for going through the hair, having, for all that, the power to pierce the skin, as Fred found, and he soon made a sort of rabbit leap off the bed on to the floor, and confronted his tormentors, who directly took to ignoble flight; but they did not get off scot-free, for Fred managed to send a missile in the shape of one of the brushes flying after them, and it caught Harry a pretty good thump in the back with the hardest part.

"I say," said Philip, when they were nearly dressed, "we were to have gone to the mill last night to bob for eels; let's go to-night, or Dusty Bob will think we are not coming."

"Oh, he wouldn't expect us when he saw what a fire there was. He would know that we should not go directly afterwards. But we might go to-night, though. Let's ask Mamma to have tea early, so that we can start directly after."

"Well, but we have not had breakfast yet," said Fred.

"Well, I know that," said Harry; "but it's always best to be in good time about everything, and then you don't get all behind. I say, what shall we do this morning? I should like to go down to the seashore. Let's ask Papa to take us."

"Why, what's the use," said Philip, "when you know how busy he is about the fire? I shouldn't like to ask him. But he said he would take us again before Fred goes back, so let's wait and see."

Breakfast finished, the boys went out in the garden to amuse themselves, and plenty there always seemed to be in that garden to amuse any one of reasonable desires. There was fruit in abundance to begin with—no bad thing for a commencement either, as Harry appeared to think, for he began feasting first upon the gooseberries, and then turned his attention to the cherries on the big tree in the corner by the shrubbery—the tree which bore the great white Bigareau cherries; and it was quite time they were picked, for some were split right down the side from over-ripeness, while the sparrows had been attacking others, and had committed sad havoc amongst them—the little pert rascals having picked out all the finest and ripest for their operations, and then, after taking a few bites out of the richest and sweetest part, they commenced upon another. As for Harry, who was not at all a particular youth, he used to make a point of choosing the sparrow-picked cherries—saying that they were the ripest and sweetest.

Harry was up in the fork of the tree, reaching the fruit and throwing it down to his companions, when the attention of all three boys was taken up by the movements of a little bird in a tree close by; it was one of the little titmice, and the tiny fellow seemed to be in a wonderful state of excitement, darting from branch to branch, and emitting his sharp cry in a most querulous manner.

"I say," said Philip, "look at that tom-tit; it has a nest somewhere close by, I know."

This remark set six eyes searching about to discover the place of the little tom-tit's home. Fred began looking up in the tree and amidst the laurel bushes—parting the boughs, and peering amidst the great green leaves.

"What are you looking for?" said Harry at last.

"The tom-tit's nest," said Fred.

"Why, it's no use to look there; they always build in holes in the trees or wall. Last year there was one in that tall vase at the corner of the low wall; and we used to see the bird go down the neck ever so many times a day. It was such a snug place, nobody could touch it. I wonder where that little chap has been building. It must be close by, or he would not be so fidgety about our being here."

They all hunted about well, but no nest was to be found; so Harry came down from his elevated position, and proceeded to share the capful of cherries that he had picked in addition to those he had thrown down.

"Well, now, if that isn't droll," said Philip, laughing; "no wonder we could not find the nest: why, Harry was standing up with his foot over it. Why, there it is, in the trunk of the cherry-tree. I just saw the tom-tit fly in."

And there, sure enough, was the nest right at the bottom of a deep hole in the tree trunk, the entrance to which was by a hole so small that it seemed impossible for any bird to pass through it; for to look at the size of the tom-tit, his bulk appeared to be double the circumference of the hole; but his downy yielding little feathers gave him an easy passage through; and, as the boys went up to the tree, out he darted with a sharp cry, and flew away.

"There's a hen-bird in the hole, sitting," said Harry, "and he has been to feed her, I know. Let's try." Saying which, he took a piece of stick, and began to insert it gently into the hole.

"Don't hurt it," said Philip. "Don't poke the stick in."

"Oh! I shan't hurt anything," said Harry brusquely. "Do you think I don't know what I'm about? I'm only going to push it in a little way to see if there is a nest, and then I shall—"

"Ciss-s-s-s-s-s-s-s," said something very sharply from the bottom of the hole, and back darted Harry, stick and all, as though he had been shot.

"Why, it's a snake," said Philip.

"How could a snake get there?" said Harry, looking rather discomposed.

"There must have been an egg laid in the hole," said Fred; offering, as he thought, a very clever solution of the difficulty.

"Well, but how did the egg get there?" said Harry.

"Why, it was laid there, of course," said Fred.

"Well, but," said Philip, "if an egg could be laid there, a snake could have got there; and I don't believe the English snakes could climb up the bark of a tree; and, besides, if there was one egg there would be more, for snakes' eggs are all

joined together like French rolls at the baker's shop; and then there would have been a whole lot of snakes in the hole."

"Perhaps there is a whole party of them there now," said Fred. "I wish we could split the tree open. I shan't eat any more cherries; they smell snaky."

"Get out!" said Harry; "I don't believe it was a snake at all. I wish the hole was big enough to get my hand in; I'd soon see what it was."

"But if it was a snake, it would bite," said Fred, "and poison you."

"No, it wouldn't," said Harry; "it's only adders that bite and poison; snakes are quite harmless; Papa says so, and he knows everything."

"Does he?" said a voice behind the laurels, and Mr Inglis came up to them, smiling. "And so, Master Hal, you consider that Papa knows everything, do you? Ah, my boy, when you grow older, I trust that you will prove studious enough to find out how very ignorant your father is, and to look upon all he knows in the same way that he does himself, and that is, as a mere nothing in comparison with what there is to learn around us. But," he continued, cheerfully, "what is it I am said to know so much about?"

"Why, about snakes, Papa. They won't bite, will they?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr Inglis, "and pretty sharply, too, after their fashion. I do not suppose that it would pierce your skin; but if you could occupy the position of poor froggy some day, when a snake has got hold of him by the hind legs, I think you would find that he could bite. But what made you talk about snakes?"

"Why, there's one in this tree, Papa," said Philip; "we put a stick into the hole, and it did hiss so. Now, you listen."

Philip placed a piece of wood in the hole again, and in a moment there came forth the same sharp hiss, and directly Philip darted back in the same way as his brother had a short time before.

"There, did you hear that?" said the boys.

"Oh, yes; I heard the hiss, but it was not a snake; only the noise made by the female titmouse when sitting upon her nest. It is to scare intruders away, and you see how effectually it answers the purpose, for you boys were completely startled, and thought that it was a snake. And this is very often the case in nature, that helpless birds, animals, and insects are provided with means of offence or concealment, that in a great measure balance the helplessness of their nature. But I should like you lads to read these natural history facts for yourselves, and then search, during your walks and excursions, for the objects you have read of in your studies."

Chapter 25

A Stupid Ass.

MR INGLIS then walked away, and the boys strolled about the garden in search of something to amuse them until dinner-time.

Now most people would have been content with taking a chair, and sitting, book in hand, beneath the shade of one of the trees upon the lawn. Fred might have done this had he been alone, or Philip would probably have been likely so to do; but when Harry was in company with them such a proceeding seemed to be quite out of the question, and so they wandered about in search of something to take their attention.

But there was some one watching them all this time, and mentally growling and worrying himself about the boys being at home. Now this somebody was none other than old Sam, who was up on a ladder against the house, nailing in some of the long pendant branches of the roses which had here and there broken loose, and were trailing down low enough to catch the dresses of those who passed by. Sam had been grunting and hammering, and hammering and grunting, and he was not in a very good temper; for, in looking round and watching the boys, he had missed the head of the nail he was aiming at, and had given a sufficiently hard rap to his finger to draw blood; and this was of course put down to the credit of "them boys;" in fact, they could not have met with more blame if one of them had taken up the hammer and struck the blow, while the others had aided and abetted.

At last Sam saw them all turn down into the flower-garden, and then, for fear that something or another by which he set store should be handled, he got off the ladder and began very cautiously to follow them, going slowly from tree to tree, and trying to steal quietly up; but all Sam's caution was unnecessary, as the boys were not in mischief, for they were only going to the field to try and catch Neddy, the donkey, who had been on the sick list nearly all the time of Fred's visit, and had been turned out in a field some distance from the house. But now Neddy had been reported quite well for some days past, so the boys were determined upon having a ride, so as to do something towards filling up the time until after tea, when they were to go to the mill-dam bobbing for eels.

They soon reached the cedar-field, where the cob pony was grazing as well as the donkey; and as soon as the visitors entered, down went the pony's head, and up went his heels and tail, and away he galloped as fast as he could lay his hoofs to the ground, and after him went the donkey, but only at the rate of about one hundred yards to the pony's two.

Now the pony was not wanted, but he must needs begin setting a bad example to the donkey, telling him as plainly as one animal could tell another that he did not mean to be caught, and, as "evil communications corrupt good manners," the donkey took the same whim into his great rough ash-grey head, and galloped after the pony as hard as he could. It was of no use to say, "come then," or "coop—coop—coop," for both of the four-footed beasts seemed to have an idea that they were to race and tear round the field just as long as they liked, and that they could go far better without saddle, bridle, or rider than they could with.

Seeing how much slower Neddy the donkey was than the pony, it was not very long before he was cut off from following his companion's capers; but even then he was as far off from being caught as ever, for he dodged about and spun round, and, at last, when driven into close quarters, he tucked his tail in between his legs and kept his heels to the party attacking him, which was his very Irish fashion of facing the enemy.

“Now, Fred,” said Harry at last, “you stand quite still there; Philip, come in a little closer; and then when I give the word all walk forward together, and then we must have him. Phew! how hot it is!”

Harry, having posted his forces in the most suitable manner, then stood ready with a halter in his hand, knowing from fatigue-bought experience which way Master Neddy would rush, and meaning this time to try and lasso the rascal.

“Now, then,” said Harry, “close in.”

The three boys then slowly and cautiously walked towards the donkey, who was now hemmed up in a corner of the field; and, judging from appearances, he evidently meant to surrender at discretion. Harry held the halter all ready to slip over Neddy’s head, and in another moment he would have been captured but for the pony, who, seeing the danger of his companion, gave a loud neigh and started off full gallop across the field.

“Pitty-pat; pitty-pat; pitty-pat,” went the pony; and, as soon as Neddy heard it, down went his head, up went his heels, and away he rushed, and passed Harry like a shot. But Harry was ready for him, and cleverly threw his halter over the tiresome brute’s head. In a moment it was drawn tight, and as Harry held on to the other end he was dragged along by the donkey, until his foot tripping in the long grass, he left go of the halter, and down he went on all-fours, and then rolled over and over upon the ground; while away went Neddy full gallop to where the pony stood, and then the two provoking beasts walked right into the middle of the little corner pond, and stood in the mud and water, whisking their tails about, and seeming to enjoy finely the mischief of which they had been guilty.

“There’s a beast,” said Harry, sitting up in the grass, and chewing bits of strand. “Won’t he catch it next time I get on his back. He shall pay me for tiring me out in this way. I’ll give it him.”

“Well, what shall we do?” said Philip; “we can’t get at them in the pond.”

“Can’t you drive them out with a long whip?” said Fred.

This last idea seemed to strike Harry as being feasible, and another plan popped into his head at the same moment; so, jumping up with a “won’t-be-beaten” sort of an air about him, he appealed to Philip.

“I say, Phil, old chap, I’m so tired; do go and fetch the whip.”

“What’s the good?” said Philip; “that won’t catch them.”

“No, but we’ll leave the gate open,” said his brother, “and drive them up the field into the stable, and then we can catch them easily enough.”

“Bravo!” said Fred, clapping his hands, but not making any noise from the fact of having his handkerchief in one, having been wiping his face.

Away trotted Philip, and soon returned with a long cart-whip; and then once more the boys went to the bottom of the field, and Harry advanced with the whip in his hand towards the pond.

As for Neddy, Harry might have stood at the edge of the water and cracked the whip until his donkeyship felt disposed to come out, for not a bit did he care, knowing full well that he was out of reach, and that even if the thong could have touched him he would not have felt it through his thick grey coat; and so stock-still he stood, flapping his great ears, whisking his tail, and lazily winking his eyes. But it was different with the pony: he was a thin-skinned gentleman, and not so much of a philosopher as the ass. He, too, had often felt the whip upon his flanks,

and knew the flavour, and, not being so good a judge of distance as his companion, as soon as the whip gave the first crack he made a start, and spattered out of the pond, and away up the field towards the open gate.

Stock-still stood Neddy.

"Crack!" went the whip again.

"Come out," shouted Harry.

"Poor old fellow, then," said Philip, soothingly.

"No, don't coax him, Phil," said his brother; "he don't deserve it. Only let me get at him; that's all."

For a few moments, however, there did not seem to be a chance of getting "at him, that's all;" for the donkey stood as stolidly as ever, till the pony, as he scampered up the field, gave a triumphant neigh, which roused Neddy, for he gave a frisk and a splash in the water, and then rushed out; but he did not escape quite scot-free, for Harry managed to get one crack at him with the thick end of the whip just as he galloped up the field.

Harry's manoeuvre proved successful, for they had now only to follow the donkey up as he went straight into the stable, from whence he was soon dragged out in triumph, saddled and bridled, and with Philip mounted.

"Now, then," shouted Harry to his brother, as soon as they returned to the field, "down to the bottom and back, and then it's Fred's turn."

But Neddy would not trot; it was of no use to kick him with your heels, he would only walk, so Philip called out for a stick, and then when Neddy saw the stick coming he would not walk but would trot, so that Harry could hardly catch up to him; but when he did, and handed the weapon to his brother, the donkey no sooner felt the first touch than down went his head and up went his heels, and off went Philip on to his back in the grass.

Neddy would then have started off again, but Harry was too quick for him, and soon held the rein for his brother to remount.

"He's too fresh," said Harry. "Never mind; jump up, Phil, and we'll soon take a little of his nonsense out of him."

So away Philip trotted down to the bottom and back again, and then Fred had a turn and stuck on capitally, only when he wanted to turn to the left and come up the field again, Neddy would turn to the right and go the other way—an arrangement Fred was obliged to submit to from the fact of his whole attention being required to sit on tight, without guiding his steed.

At last Harry's turn came, and it was some time before he could manage to mount, for Neddy was very shy of the rough hawthorn stick the lad held; and so he kept backing and pirouetting until Philip went on the opposite side with his stick, when the fidgety little scamp suffered himself to be mounted.

"Crack," went the stick, and up went Neddy's heels. "Crack—crack—crack," went the stick again, and up went Neddy's heels four, five, six times over. But the donkey had this time met with his match, and, in spite of his kicking and shuffling, Harry sat him like a hero. 'Tis true that he was bumped all sorts of ways—right and left—on to the donkey's neck—on to his crupper, and was several times nearly off, but never quite; so that at last Neddy gave up in despair, submitted to his thrashing, and then cantered down the field and back, and afterwards allowed himself, with a very good grace, to be ridden about as long as

his masters liked; for they had really proved themselves the masters that day in more senses than one.

At last Neddy was declared to have done his duty, and was set at liberty by the stable-door—a good feed of oats being awarded to him as a recompense for all he had gone through, and then the donkestrians went in to their mid-day meal, Fred feeling wonderfully improved in his ability as to riding.

Chapter 26

Bobbing around.

IN THE afternoon, as they were sitting under a shady tree, eating a dessert of strawberries, Harry began to wish that it was tea-time, so as to get started for the mill-dam, about which place his whole conversation had been since Neddy had been returned to the stable.

"Oh! I do wish it was time to start," said Harry. "I wonder how many we shall catch."

"Oh! not many," said Philip. "We only caught twelve last time."

"Ah! but then see how it came on to rain, else we could have caught dozens more."

"Suppose Dusty Bob does not get the what-d'ye-call-'ems ready!" said Fred.

"What! the bobs? Oh! he's sure to have them ready," said Philip. "He knows that he will get a shilling for making them, so he is sure to be there, with them all in a flower pot. Isn't he, Harry?"

"Oh, yes!" said Harry; "he'll have the bobs ready; he dare not do otherwise, or we should duck him in the mill-pond; shouldn't we, Phil!"

"What a brag you are, Harry!" said Fred. "What's the good of telling such fibs as that! Why, you wouldn't touch him at all!"

"Well, you'll see," said Harry, "if the bobs are not ready."

They soon had an opportunity of testing whether the bobs were ready or not, for an early tea was hastily partaken of, and then they set off,—Mr and Mrs Inglis having promised to come and meet them, and to help them carry home the spoils.

The boys were in too great a hurry to get down to the mill, to take any notice of the attraction they met upon the road. Harry was compelled to have one shy at the squirrel that scampered up into the chestnut tree; but with that exception not a stoppage was made, and in a very short time they came to the plank over the great ditch—the plank which replaced the one that broke when it was danced on the day that the basket of fish was lost after the visit to the fish-traps. This time, however, it was quietly crossed, and in a few minutes the figure of Dusty Bob became visible as he leaned against a post outside the mill, and smoked his pipe.

"Sarvant, young gentlemen," said Bob, as the boys came up. "'Spected to ha' seen yow yesterday."

"Oh, but we have been so busy since the fire, Bob," said Harry, and he spoke as though he really believed that they had been busy; but, if asked what they had

been busy about, I think it very doubtful whether Master Harry could have given a satisfactory answer. “Never mind about that though, now,” said Harry; “where are the bobs?”

“Oh! I’ve got ’em all right,” said Bob; “but I don’t see why I couldn’t have a drop o’ beer up at t’ fire, as well as other folks.”

“Well, why didn’t you?” said Harry; “Papa had a whole barrel brought out.”

“Oh! I dunno,” said Bob; “I knows I never got none, and other folks got lots; and I says to my mate as it warn’t fair.”

“Well, but why didn’t you have some, Bob?” said Philip; “Papa meant it for everybody that had been helping.”

“I knows that,” said Bob; “but nobody asked me to have none.” And then Bob filled his pipe again, and looked very sulky as he went on smoking, for it was very evident that his dignity had been much touched over the beer business. However, he soon seemed to come to the conclusion that the lads before him were not to blame for his coming short of the needful refreshment; and, turning the lighted tobacco out of his pipe into the mill-dam, where it fell with a “ciss,” he led the way into the mill, from whence he produced three light poles and some string, and from out of a cool damp flower pot three hideous-looking looped up bunches of worms, each with a leaden weight in the centre.

“There,” said Harry, “I knew he would have them. Hooray, boys! come on.”

Bob soon tied the bunches, or bobs, of worms strung upon worsted to a string, fastened to the poles, and then posted each boy in what he considered an eligible spot on the banks of the deep mill-dam. He took Fred, as being the novice, under his own especial charge, and began to instruct him how to proceed.

“There, yow see,” said Bob, “yow lets the bob sink gently down to the bottom, and, when yow feel it touches, just draw it up a little ways till the eels sticks their teeth into it, and then pull it gently up a-top, and then out wi’ ’em in a minute.”

All this time Dusty Bob was suiting the action to the word, and showing Fred how it should be done, waiting all the while till one of the eels did stick his teeth in, which was in the course of a very few minutes, when Bob softly raised his bob to the surface, lifted it out quickly, and a fine eel dropped off into the water again.

“Never mind,” said Bob, “try again; that’s the way.”

So this time Fred tried, and let his great bait sink to the bottom, when, directly after, he felt something go “tug, tug” at it, and then again, quite sharply. At first he hardly knew what to do, but another tug made him draw the bait up to the surface, when he distinctly saw an eel leave it, giving a vicious snatch at the bait as it did so.

Just then Harry landed a fine fellow, which gave a serpentine sort of a wriggle, and regained the water in a moment.

“There, that’s the way to do it,” said Philip, who at that moment secured one. “Try again, Harry.”

But Harry was already trying again; and, profiting by past experience, had succeeded in landing two or three decent-sized eels, one after another, and secured them all. There was no stopping to bait the hook, and no disengaging the fish from the bait, for they let go of the worstedy worm as soon as they were lifted out of the water, or as soon as they could drag their teeth out of the woolly delicacy; and as to biting, they seized the bob with the greatest eagerness, for it

was evident that the mill-dam swarmed with the eel tribe, now seeking their prey upon the warm summer evening—evidently a time when they loved to leave their muddy abodes.

"How many have you caught, Fred?" said Philip.

"Six," said Fred, in a half whisper; for he had one just then at his bob.

"Why, where are they then?" said Harry.

"Oh! I caught them all," said Fred; "but they tumbled in again."

"There's a goose," said Harry; "why, you did not catch them then. Here's another, such a big one," he continued, as he landed one nearly as thick as his wrist. "How many have you got, Phil?"

"Only four," said Philip, "and such little ones, I shall change places with somebody. No, I shan't," he continued; "there's a beauty. Why, that's bigger than yours, Hal."

"No, it isn't," said Harry, "I'm sure; but look, Fred's got one."

But Fred had not, for, in spite of the many bites he obtained, not a fish could he draw out of the water; for without exception they all fell in again, he not having yet hit upon the knack of landing them, which should be done with a quick but gentle motion; for the slightest jerk makes the eel loose its hold.

"I say, how do you do it?" said Fred, at last, after missing eight or nine.

"Do what?" said Dusty Bob, coming out of the mill.

"Why, catch these nasty slippery things," said Fred. "Every time I try to get one on the bank, he always drops off too soon, and I lose him."

"Why, it's easy enew," said Bob, going up to him and taking hold of the pole. "Just drop the bait in quietly, so, and wait till yow feels 'em at it, when—there—he's tugging away a good un at it—now look; I jist draws him up a-top, and then out he comes. There yow see, I can do it straight."

And sure enough, Dusty Bob drew a fine silvery-looking eel to the top, and, with a turn of his wrist, landed it upon the bank.

Wriggle and twist went the eel—trying to get back into the water, and to all appearances he would soon have been there; and Dusty Bob, evidently thinking such would be the case, made an awkward jump at the wriggling fish, and jumped just upon the wet part of the bank where Fred's bob had been out before some twenty or thirty times. Up went Bob's heels, and the boys stared, quite aghast; for with a tremendous splash, in he went right into the deepest part of the mill-pond; when, after a few seconds, up he rose, and began to strike out for the shallow part where he could land; for the bank where he fell off was very steep, and, for about three feet, staved up with boards.

As soon as Harry saw that there was no danger, he burst out laughing, and shouted, "Now, boys, bob away, here's such a whopper," and began to drop his great bunch of worms just in front of Bob's head, to the intense disgust of that worthy, and the delight of Philip and Fred; who, of course, must follow suit, and begin to tease the unfortunate miller in the same way. But Bob soon scrambled out of the water, looking very pasty, and dripping all over the bank. He did not stop to speak, but hurried into his cottage to change his things, while the boys, laughing over his mishap, returned to their bobbing.

But the eels did not seem to have approved of the visitor who had been upon their domains, and, judging from appearances, they had all bade good-bye to the

place, for not another bite could either of the boys get in the mill-pool; so they had to try in the deep part of the back-water, where they met with a little better success, and between them succeeded in capturing about two dozen more; when they found that the mist was rising heavily from off the water, and various other indications pointed out that it was time to think of returning homeward.

The poles were soon placed in a corner of the mill-yard, and the basket containing the eels being carefully tied down, they next went in search of Bob; but he was not visible, and his wife came to the door to say that the young gentlemen might say anything they liked to her.

The boys placed the right interpretation upon this message, and left a shilling for Bob, which was received with a curtsey, and then the fishermen started off with a heavy basket and light hearts; but had not gone far before they met Mr and Mrs Inglis, who had come in accordance with their promise.

The moon was just rising over the trees as they came within sight of the Grange; while in the north-west, Mr Inglis pointed out a heavy bank of clouds which every now and then seemed to quiver with the flashes of sheet lightning that played about it, the evident precursors of a heavy storm. The night was sultry in the extreme, and almost oppressive in its stillness; but the boys could pay but little heed to the appearances of the weather, every thought being taken up with the eels they had captured, and the splash which Bob made when he went into the mill-dam.

The appearances of the coming weather that Mr Inglis had pointed out were, however, not deceitful; for before the boys went to bed that night, the flashes of lightning became more and more vivid; the thunder, from muttering at a distance, began to break, as it were, just over the house; and then down came the rain, almost in a sheet.

“What a pity!” said Harry, all at once, just as they were going up to bed.

“What is a pity?” said Mr Inglis.

“Why,” said Harry, “what a pity all this rain did not come when the fire was burning.”

When the boys reached their bedroom, the storm raged with such violence that sleep was out of the question; so they put the candles in one room, and all three stood at the window to watch the lightning. Every now and then the whole heavens seemed to be lit up with one vast blaze of light, which showed the outlines of all the clouds in the most dazzling manner; then came the deafening peals of thunder, while all around looked of the most intense darkness; and the rain came splashing down, beating against the windows, and rushing off the eaves in streams.

And thus it kept on for about an hour, when the storm seemed to abate, the lightning coming at longer intervals, and the thunder gradually becoming more and more distant, till at last it subsided into a low angry muttering; though the lightning still kept quivering and flashing—making everything in the bedroom appear with the greatest distinctness.

“Well,” said Harry at last, “I’ve had enough storm, and I’m going to bed; so out you go, Mr Fred, into your own room.”

Mr Fred was too tired and sleepy to enter into any fun that night, so he sleepily went into his own place; and before the thunder had ceased muttering in the

distance, the boys were all soundly asleep, breathing heavily the soft cool air—rendered so fresh and pure by the late storm, and so plainly perceptible in its difference from the heavy oppressive atmosphere of the early evening.

Chapter 27

Loud Sighs—More Sorrow.

FRED'S VISIT was now drawing fast to a close, and the boys among themselves were comparing notes as to how wonderfully swift the days had glided away.

"Oh, dear; oh, dear," said Harry, with a sigh; "only think, next week we shall be back at school, and learning that beastly old Latin again; a nasty dirty old dead language. It isn't right: if a language is dead, it ought to be buried. They ought to make a cavibus in terribus, and bury the old blunderbuss. Shouldn't I like to have smothered old Valpy!"

"Ah," said Philip; "Latin isn't half so bad as that old Euclid, with all its straight lines, and angles, and bother. Heigho! wouldn't it be nice to be a bird, and not have any lessons to learn! I should like to be an eagle, to circle up and up towards the sun, and—"

"Ho—ho—ho!" laughed Harry, who was not at all a poetical young gentleman; "you wouldn't do for an eagle; if you turned into a bird, like that chap in 'Evenings at Home,' you'd be only an old cocksparrow, and cry 'chizzywick, chizzywick,' all day long."

Hereupon Philip thought it was his duty to resent this great insult, and gave chase to Harry, who dodged him about in the field where they were; and the tormentor, being the more nimble of the two, escaped his well-merited punishment.

"Come, I say," said Fred, shouting as loudly as he could, "it's time to start. The car has gone round to the door."

This announcement brought Fred's cousins tearing up to the spot where he stood, and then, going round to the front, they found Mr Inglis with what few things he required, just giving orders to Sam to go and look for the boys.

"Oh! here they are," said Mr Inglis. "Come, lads, jump up; you are just in time. What would you have said if I had gone without you?"

"We weren't afraid of that," said Harry; "were we, boys? I know Papa wouldn't say he'd take us, and then leave us behind."

They were off once more to the sea-side, but this time for the afternoon only. The day was a regular scorcher, and the poor horse began to show symptoms of the heat, in spite of the careful driving of Mr Inglis; and a regular cloud of flies about his head so teased it, keeping regularly on at the same pace as the horse, whether a walk or a trot, that Mr Inglis was at last compelled to stop and let Harry cut a couple of little elm branches, and fix them in the harness, so that, by their constant vibration and shaking, they might keep the tiresome insect pests at a distance. But the travellers soon began to find that they ought to have boughs

secured to their own heads, for the flies, disappointed of their feast upon the horse, turned their attention to the party in the dog-cart, and, until they were quite clear of the wooded part of the country, bothered them terribly.

The day was so hot that the whole atmosphere seemed to tremble and quiver, while everything else was motionless. Not a breath of air was stirring to wave the grass or to ruffle the surface of the great land-drains, whose waters shone like molten silver; while the road was powdered into an almost impalpable dust, which rose in clouds as the horse's hoofs beat and the wheels spun over its arid surface.

At last, however, as they neared the sea-bank, a soft and cooling breeze began to fan the travellers' cheeks; the horse tossed his head and snuffed the air, as though delighted with the grateful sensation it imparted; and at the end of another quarter of an hour the car wheels were sinking deep in the dry sandy road which led up to the inn, where they were going on this occasion to leave the horse, as this afternoon's trip was only for a quiet ramble by the sea to collect a few stranded sea-weeds and shells.

When they reached the shore, they found the tide coming in, while the sands were as level and smooth on the elevated parts as a table, though, in the lower, beautifully and regularly traced all over with the little ripple-marks left by the sea when the tide is going out upon a calm day. There was no difficulty about gathering specimens, for the gentle waves landed plenty of beautiful weeds at their feet, while many shells and prettily-marked pebbles lay about the sands.

"Oh! how hot," said Harry; "shouldn't I like a dip! I say, Papa, mayn't we have a bathe?"

"Oh! yes, Papa, do let us," said Philip; "it would be beautiful. I should like to go in so much."

Fred was as anxious to have a dip as his cousins; and as the tide was coming in, and the water as smooth as possible, Mr Inglis gave his consent, and stopped upon the sands while the boys all jumped into the bathing-machine; and the old horse being fastened to it, they were dragged a short distance into the water, and there left. They soon had the door opened, and then one at a time made their appearance in the sea, where they swam about to their hearts' content; of course, Harry and Philip performing all the swimming, and Fred the splashing. And delightful was that bathe, for the sun shone so warmly that the water felt quite tepid, and there was no disposition to shiver or feel cold, but every little wave that rolled in seemed to be laden with freshness and vigour. The boys enjoyed their dip so much that Mr Inglis had to call them out, or they would have stopped in for an hour. But he had them out when they had been in about twenty minutes; and as soon as they were dressed, the collecting of specimens went on. At the mouth of one little inlet they found a dead puffin—a singular little bird that makes its home on the rocky shores further north, and remarkable for its curious wedge-shaped bill, looking like the point of an old Roman sword, and to all appearance a rather formidable weapon. There were plenty of gulls and kittywakes running about at the edge of the waves, picking up the little insects and small crustaceans that abounded upon the sands. Fred here made further acquaintance with the little hermit crab, and saw how it protected itself, and chose its habitation from amongst the empty shells upon the beach; and when it had found one that it

considered a good fit, thrust in its little tail, and dwelt there until it grew too confined for it.

Numberless were the objects of interest to be seen all along the coast, and pleasant was the ramble the party enjoyed until it grew towards the hour for returning, when they walked back to the opening in the sand-bank, so as to reach the inn and get the horse and car ready for starting. The tide was now nearly at its height, and a brisk evening breeze had commenced blowing, so that, as the tide rolled in, the breakers began to be of a tolerable size. There were several people, old and young, enjoying an evening bath; and, after ordering the car to be got ready, Mr Inglis and the boys strolled back and watched the waves come tumbling in upon the beach or rush up the opening that led into the great land-drain—an opening that was staked on each side in the shape of a cage-work tunnel, and ran down for some distance into the sea on the one hand, and right under the great sea-bank on the other.

Just as the party were turning to leave the shore, a piercing cry rose from off the water, and then another, and another, evidently proceeding from some one in distress.

A moment's glance served to show Mr Inglis that the cry proceeded from one of the bathers, and, in company with many more people, he ran down to the water's edge, when he could see that a boy was battling with the waves, his head just above water, and crying for help in the most heartrending tones. People were running about wringing their hands, while those who had been bathing were huddling on their clothes, and others, again, had gone to seek for a boat; but it was very plain that, if assistance were not immediately rendered, the boy would be drowned.

"Is there no one here that can swim?" said Mr Inglis. "A sovereign to the man who fetches the poor fellow in."

But only one person came forward, and that was Harry, who began to strip off his jacket and shoes ready for the plunge.

"Back! you foolish boy; you have not strength," said Mr Inglis; and then, without waiting to make a further appeal for aid, he stripped off his coat, and dashing through the waves was soon swimming towards where the boy was still shrieking loudly, but in a fainter tone, for help; for every now and then the waves washed over his head, which seemed to get lower in the water every moment.

Mr Inglis was a powerful swimmer, and clove swiftly through the water in spite of his clothes, which clung to him and bore him down. In a very short space he was by the side of the drowning boy, who clutched at him, and would have no doubt put him in great peril but for an effort which he made to get behind. He then grasped the boy by the hair, and turned to swim ashore; but to his horror he found that the poor fellow was caught in some way in the piles of the outlet, and, in spite of every effort, Mr Inglis could not set him free: he essayed to dive, but the tide ran so strongly that he was unable to effect his object; he dragged the poor fellow backwards and forwards, and tried to reach beneath the waves at the obstruction, but without success; and, as a last resource, tried to keep the poor boy's head above water until assistance arrived; but this even he found impossible, for the tide had so risen that it now covered him completely with every wave that washed in. Mr Inglis made one more desperate effort to free the poor

fellow, but without success; and then, feeling his power failing, he turned to reach the shore, just as Harry swam up to beg of him to come back, for he was fearful lest his father should be too fatigued to return. And it was time he did return, for it required all his strength to reach the shore, where he arrived just as a boat was launched, and four men put off to try and save the poor boy.

Mr Inglis and Harry hurried into the inn, where they borrowed dry clothes, and when dressed they heard the mournful news that the body had not been recovered, for the men could not even find the place from the fact of the rapid rise of the tide. But Mr Inglis felt now how hopeless was the case, even if the poor lad's remains were found; and heart-sick, he hurried down to the car, and drove rapidly off homewards, the sad incident they had witnessed having deeply impressed them all, and brought strongly to their recollection the misfortune that so nearly fell upon their own home but a short time back.

The journey was soon performed, and in almost perfect silence; for, in addition to the natural fatigue felt by the party, the past adventure hung like a cloud over their spirits till they reached the rose-hung porch just in the dusk of evening.

Chapter 28

Good-Bye.

AT LAST the morning dawned that was to be Fred's last at Hollowdell Grange, and sadly and gloomily he had proceeded overnight to pack up his things in the box he had brought down with him, merely leaving out such articles as were required for immediate use. A month had slipped away so swiftly, that it seemed almost impossible that such a space could have elapsed since that hot, breathless day, when, so new and strange, he had met his cousins upon the platform, after asking Jem Barnes, the porter, to direct him to his uncle's house. So strange, and so rough and countryfied everything had appeared; and so low, dejected, and tired had he felt when he first left the train; how he had wished himself back in town! And now, how different he felt; he was as low-spirited as when he first came down, but it was with the idea of going away. All those upon whom he had at first looked with distant eyes, now seemed so dear to him. There were his uncle and aunt; his cousins; there was Old Sam; Dusty Bob, the maids; Dick, the dog; and even the raven and parrot: he was mournful at parting with all of them, and would have given anything to have stayed, if only for another day. And now he stood in his little bedroom, looking around it, almost with tears in his eyes, as he slowly dressed himself, and placed the remainder of his things in his box.

He had just finished, and was sitting moodily upon the box-lid, when Harry and Philip entered the room, both looking as dull and miserable as himself.

"Oh! dear," said Harry, "what a thing it is that holidays will go so jolly fast, and work-days so horribly slow! It ain't fair. Don't I wish that they were all to come over again; there's lots of things we have not done yet, and lots of places where we ought to have gone."

“When are you coming down again, Fred?” said Philip.

“I don’t know,” said Fred; “I don’t want to go away. I should like to see Papa and Mamma, but I’d rather they came down here. I shall never never like old bricks-and-mortary London again. It will be so smoky, and noisy, and nasty, and miserable. Oh! I do wish I could stop.”

“But you used to say that you could not think how people could live in the country, and would not believe that we could find plenty of fun down here,” said Harry.

Fred would not hear this last remark, but sat moodily upon his box till breakfast time; and his cousins stayed with him—Harry all the time cutting viciously at a bit of stick with his keen-edged knife, and strewing the bedroom carpet with chips. The sun shone brighter, the sky looked more blue, and the trees greener than ever; but the boys could not enjoy that glorious morning; there was no elasticity of spirit, no bounding out into the garden; no teasing of poor old Sam; no race round the cedar-field before breakfast, for Fred sat on his box, gloomy and out of heart, Philip sat with his legs stretched out and his hands in his pockets, and Harry sat and carved away at his stick, until he was obliged to get up,—which he did with a sigh,—and go down stairs to get a fresh piece of wood.

Just then the breakfast bell rang, and Mary walked along the passage with the hot cake and eggs; but no one ran against her, for the boys tidied slowly into the room, and took their places at the table in the most dejected way imaginable. Fred could not eat; Philip could not eat; Harry could; but he ate viciously, and in a tigerish manner, and smashed in the top of his egg as though it had been the head of the engine-driver who was to take Fred up to London; while as for coffee, he kept asking for cups until Mrs Inglis refused to give him any more, when the wretched boy consoled himself with another wedge of cake.

“Come, boys; come, boys,” said Mr Inglis at last; “this will never do; partings must follow meetings, and all holidays must have an end. I am sorry that your cousin must leave you; but I feel glad to see that he leaves us with regret, for that seems to say that he has enjoyed his trip. Is it not so, Fred? You have enjoyed your visit, I hope?”

“Oh! so much, Uncle,” said Fred; “only it has been such a short one, and it makes me so cross to think that I didn’t want to come.”

Mr Inglis smiled, and said, “But you will want to come another time, I hope?”

“Oh! may I? may I come again?” burst out Fred, with eyes sparkling, and half rising from his chair.

“I shall be only too happy to see you again, my boy; but what say Harry and Philip. Have they asked you to come again?”

“We did not ask him,” said Philip; “but Fred knows we want him to come again.”

“I don’t want him to go now,” said Harry, with his mouth full of cake. “Do, Papa, write and ask for another week’s holiday for him!”

“But you go back to school yourselves the day after to-morrow,” said Mr Inglis; “and what would you do then? No, my boys, depend upon it the real secret of enjoyment is to leave off when you have had enough; and nothing is more surfeiting, more cloying, than too much pleasure. Fred must come down again; and I hope the next time he visits us we shall not nearly have him drowned. I fear that he will take a sad report of us all back with him to town.”

Fred was very anxious to go away good friends with everybody, and would have liked very much to have shaken hands with Mr Jones, Bill Jenkins, and the Stapleses; but this could not very well be managed, for Mr Jones had left for the sea-side, and Bill Jenkins had gone to a situation. However, Fred bade farewell to everybody he could think of, and left messages for those he could not see; and at last the time of starting arrived, and Old Sam brought the pony and chaise round to the door.

The box was lifted in; and the little hamper filled with fruit, and the large bandbox full of curiosities that Fred had collected, all found a place by the departing visitor. The morning was brighter than ever, and everything around him looked so fresh and lovely, that a great sob would keep trying to get up into poor Fred's throat to make a noise, and the efforts he made to keep it down quite upset him. He gave such a longing farewell look up at the front of the house, and round at the garden, then kissed Mrs Inglis, and shook hands with Sam, who returned the grasp warmly, and said in a whisper about the greatest thing he could say, and that was that he wished he "warn't a-going."

Harry and Philip were in the dickey of the four-wheel chaise, both sitting in very uncomfortable positions on account of Fred's luggage; but I very much doubt whether they ever thought of their position, so engrossed were they with the *one* sole idea—that Fred was going, and the holidays were over. But Mr Inglis had now taken the reins from Sam, and had mounted to his seat; so that nothing remained but for Fred to follow his example, for the train would soon be due at the station—though the boys were rather in hopes that they would be too late, and so secure another day; but Mr Inglis knew what uneasiness this would cause to friends in town, so he prepared to start at once.

Fred put one foot on the step, and was just going to wave his adieu, when a sudden thought seemed to strike him, and leaping down, he rushed round by the shrubbery in the direction of the stable-yard and was out of sight in a moment. But before any one could surmise where he had gone, he reappeared, and a loud rattling of chain, and the barking of Dick, told that he had been to say good-bye to the dog. Fred was in his place in a moment; Sam let go of the pony's head; Mrs Inglis waved her hand from the porch; and Cook and Mary shook their aprons from one of the upstairs windows; the pony darted forward, the wheels spun round, and Fred felt that indeed his holiday was ended. But the bright day and the quick motion through the air served in some degree to raise the spirits of all three boys, so that, by the time they reached the railway, the excitement and bustle of hurrying Fred off gave them no time to think of sorrow; for the train came shrieking and grinding into the station; Jem Barnes was running about shouting "'ll'dell," "'ll'dell," "'ll'dell," as loudly as he could, but not a passenger responded; though a stranger would have been sadly puzzled to know what he meant. Then there was the banging of a door; the ringing of a bell; a shrill chirruping whistle; and then "puff-puff," "pant-pant," the train glided slowly past the faces of Mr Inglis, Harry, and Philip; then faster and faster past the various objects familiar to the young traveller; and then again faster and faster still, till at last all grew stranger and stranger, and Fred Morris sank back in his seat, thought over the events of the past month, and began to thoroughly realise the truth that he had finished his visit to Hollowdell Grange.