

A boy was once going home from school through the woods. It was very early in the spring time, and nothing green was to be seen, save some moss on the edge of a little brook, which ran along over the stones, talking to itself. As the boy went whistling along, with his satchel of books, and a small tin pail with his dinner, slung on a pole at his back, he saw by the new chips scattered about, that the woodcutters had been at work there, since morning. Looking round, he saw a large white oak tree lying on the ground. Thinking to make himself a whistle out of the green twigs, he set down his satchel and pail, and marched up to the tree. He soon discover-

ed a large knot-hole in the trunk; and, boy-like, he must needs peep into it. At first, he saw nothing but a little hairy bunch; but presently something began to move, and he saw that he had found a squirrel's nest. Here was a treasure for a school-boy! There were four little baby squirrels, their eyes not yet opened, curled up together on a nice warm bed of moss, in the old oak tree. He took them out, and put them in his tin pail, thinking to carry them home. But the boy had a very kind heart under his jacket; and the kind heart began to say to him, that when the mother of the squirrels came home, she would be in great distress to find her babies gone. So he packed them all in the hole again, and hid himself in a bush, that he might see what the old squirrel would do, when she came back and found her house knocked down.

Before long, he saw a gray squirrel running along the stone wall, with a nut in her mouth. She frisked down the wall, and over the ground, as swift as a bird; for she was in a great hurry to see her children. But when she came to the tree, she dropped her nut, and looked round in astonishment. She went smelling all about, then she mounted the stump to take a survey of the country. There she stood a moment, on her hind legs, and snuffed the air, with a look of great wonder and distress. Whether her sense of smell was so acute, that she discovered her little ones near by, or whether she remembered the familiar landscape, and the bark of the tree she had climbed so often, I know not; but she would not leave the spot. Again and again, she mounted the stump, stood erect, looked round keenly, and snuffed the air.

At last, a lucky thought seemed to strike her. She ran along the trunk of the fallen tree, and found her hole. You may depend upon it, there was great joy in the moss cradle! She staid a few minutes, long enough to give the little ones their supper, and then off she scampered on the stone wall again. The boy followed in the direction she went, and hid himself where he could watch. She came back shortly, took one of her young ones in her mouth, and set off at full speed, to the knot-hole of another tree. She came back again and again, almost as swift as the wind, and

never stopped to take a moment's rest, till she had carried all four of her little ones to their new home. The boy followed her, being careful not to go near enough to frighten her; and he saw her clamber up and place each one safely in a knot-hole. Afterward, when he went to drive the cows to and from pasture, he always went round by that tree; and when he saw the happy mother and her four little ones capering among the green leaves, or sitting upright on the boughs, eating, after their pretty fashion, he felt glad indeed that he did not rob the poor squirrel, who had been so careful of her young.

If the school-boy had known how to write poetry, he might have told his daily experience in verse like this:

'I've seen the freakish squirrels drop
Down from their leafy tree;
The little squirrels with the old—
Great joy it was to me!

And down unto the running brook,
I've seen them nimbly go
And the bright water seemed to speak
A welcome kind and low.

The nodding plants they bowed their heads,
As if, in heartsome cheer,
They spoke unto those little things,
'Tis pleasant living here!'

The same boy afterward traded with another for a little squirrel, taken from its mother's nest before its eyes were open. He made a bed of moss for it, and fed it very

tenderly. It seemed healthy and happy, but never grew as large as other squirrels. He did not put it in a cage; for the kind-hearted boy thought that little animals, made to run and caper about in the green woods, could not be happy shut up. He knew it was not manly to be selfish about anything; and so he thought more of the squirrel's comfort, than he did of his own grief, if it should run away. Yet if he had lost his squirrel, he would have cried most bitterly. There was no danger. There is no cord so strong as that of kindness. The pretty little creature loved him too well to leave him. She would run after him, and come at his call, like a kitten. While he was gone to school, she would run off to the woods, to a favourite tree that stood

near his path homeward; and there she would frisk round with the other squirrels, or take a nap in a knot-hole. If the weather was very warm, she would, according to the comfortable fashion of squirrels, make herself a bed of twigs and green leaves across a crotch of the boughs, and sleep there. When her friend came from school, he had only to call 'Bun, Bun, Bun,' as he passed the tree, and down she would come, run up on his shoulder, and go home with him for her supper.

If we always treated animals with tenderness, they would live with us in this free and familiar way. Would it not be beautiful?

I wish boys would learn to cultivate the spirit of the gentle poet Cowper, who thus addresses a little frightened hare, that took refuge in his garden:

'Yes, thou mayest eat thy bread, and lick the hand

That feeds thee; thou mayest frolic on the floor

At evening, and at night retire secure

To thy straw couch, and slumber unalarmed;

For I have gained thy confidence, have pledged

All that is human in me, to protect

Thine unsuspecting gratitude and love.'



Story from book: Flowers for children



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