

CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

WILD ANIMALS  
I HAVE KNOWN

---

Ernest Thompson  
Seton

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED



# Wild Animals Have Known

and 200 Drawings

by

Ernest Seton Thompson



NATURALIST TO THE GOVERNMENT OF MANITOBA - AUTHOR OF BIRDS OF MANITOBA & MAMMALS OF MANITOBA - ART: ANATOMY OF ANIMALS

Being the Personal Histories of  
Lobo  
Silverspot  
Rappylup  
Bingo  
The Springfield Fox  
The Pacing Mustang  
Wully  
and Redruff



## CONTENTS

NOTE TO THE READER	1
SILVERSPOT	7
RAGGYLUG	29
BINGO	61
THE PACING MUSTANG	85
WULLY	113
REDRUFF	133
LOBO	169
THE SPRINGFIELD FOX	195

## NOTE TO THE READER

THESE STORIES are true. Although I have left the strict line of historical truth in many places, the animals in this book were all real characters. They lived the lives I have depicted, and showed the stamp of heroism and personality more strongly by far than it has been in the power of my pen to tell.

I believe that natural history has lost much by the vague general treatment that is so common. What satisfaction would be derived from a ten-page sketch of the habits and customs of Man? How much more profitable it would be to devote that space to the life of some one great man. This is the principle I have endeavored to apply to my animals. The real personality of the individual, and his view of life are my theme, rather than the ways of the race in general, as viewed by a casual and hostile human eye.

This may sound inconsistent in view of my having pieced together some of the characters, but that was made necessary by the fragmentary nature of the records. There is, however, almost no deviation from the truth in Lobo, Bingo, and the Mustang.

Lobo lived his wild romantic life from 1889 to 1894 in the Currumpaw region, as the ranchmen know too well, and died, precisely as related, on January 31, 1894.

Bingo was my dog from 1882 to 1888, in spite of interruptions, caused by lengthy visits to New York, as my Manitoban friends will remember. And my old friend, the owner of Tan, will learn from these pages how his dog really died.

The Mustang lived not far from Lobo in the early nineties.

The story is given strictly as it occurred, excepting that there is a dispute as to the manner of his death. According to some testimony he broke his neck in the corral that he was first taken to. Old Turkeytrack is where he cannot be consulted to settle it.

Wully is, in a sense, a compound of two dogs; both were mongrels, of some collie blood, and were raised as sheep-dogs. The first part of Wully is given as it happened, after that it was known only that he became a savage, treacherous sheep-killer. The details of the second part belong really to another, a similar yaller dog, who long lived the double-life—a faithful sheep-dog by day, and a bloodthirsty, treacherous monster by night. Such things are less rare than is supposed, and since writing these stories I have heard of another double-lived sheep-dog that added to its night amusements the crowning barbarity of murdering the smaller dogs of the neighborhood. He had killed twenty, and hidden them in a sandpit, when discovered by his master. He died just as Wully did.

All told, I now have information of six of these Jekyll-Hyde dogs. In each case it happened to be a collie.

Redruff really lived in the Don Valley north of Toronto, and many of my companions will remember him. He was killed in 1889, between the Sugar Loaf and Castle Frank, by a creature whose name I have withheld, as it is the species, rather than the individual, that I wish to expose.

Silverspot, Raggylug, and Vixen are founded on real characters. Though I have ascribed to them the adventures of more than one of their kind, every incident in their biographies is from life.

The fact that these stories are true is the reason why all are tragic. The life of a wild animal always has a tragic end.

Such a collection of histories naturally suggests a common thought—a moral it would have been called in the last century. No doubt each different mind will find a moral to its taste, but I hope some will herein find emphasized a moral as old as

Scripture—we and the beasts are kin. Man has nothing that the animals have not at least a vestige of, the animals have nothing that man does not in some degree share.

Since, then, the animals are creatures with wants and feelings differing in degree only from our own, they surely have their rights. This fact, now beginning to be recognized by the Caucasian world, was first proclaimed by Moses and was emphasized by the Buddhist over 2,000 years ago.

**Ernest Seton-Thompson.**









Silverspot

The Story of a Crow



# SILVERSPOT

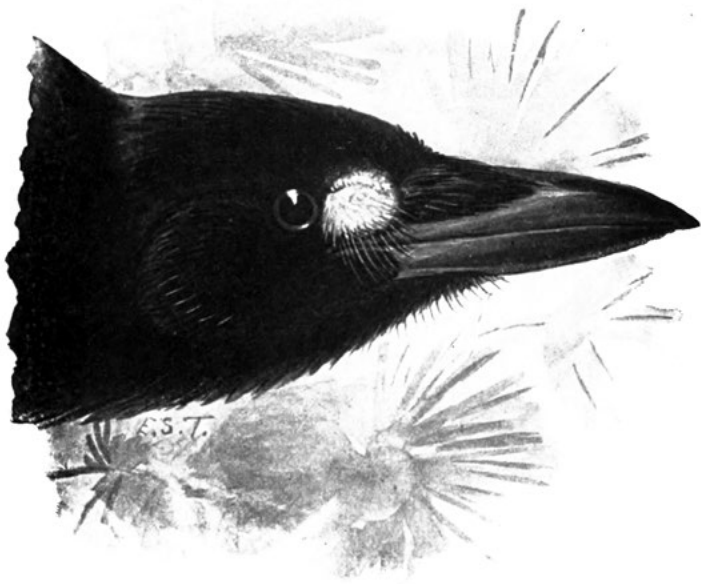
## The Story of a Crow



I

HOW MANY of us have ever got to know a wild animal? I do not mean merely to meet with one once or twice, or to have one in a cage, but to really know it for a long time while it is wild, and to get an insight into its life and history. The trouble usually is to know one creature from his fellow. One fox or crow is so much like another that we cannot be sure that it really is the same next time we meet. But once in awhile there arises an animal who is stronger or wiser than his fellow, who becomes a great leader, who is, as we would say, a genius, and if he is bigger, or has some mark by which men can know him, he soon becomes famous in his country, and shows us that the life of a wild animal may be far more interesting and exciting than that of many human beings.

Of this class were Courtant, the bob-tailed wolf that terrorized the whole city of Paris for about ten years in the beginning of the fourteenth century; Clubfoot, the lame grizzly bear that left such a terrific record in the San Joaquin Valley of California; Lobo, the king-wolf of New Mexico, that killed a cow every day for five years, and the Seonee panther that in less than two years killed nearly three hundred human beings—and such also was Silverspot, whose history, so far as I could learn it, I shall now briefly tell.



SILVERSPOT.

Silverspot was simply a wise old crow; his name was given because of the silvery white spot that was like a nickel, stuck on his right side, between the eye and the bill, and it was owing to this spot that I was able to know him from the other crows, and put together the parts of his history that came to my knowledge.

Crows are, as you must know, our most intelligent birds.—‘Wise as an old crow’ did not become a saying without good reason. Crows know the value of organization, and are as well drilled as soldiers—very much better than some soldiers, in fact, for crows are always on duty, always at war, and always dependent on each other for life and safety. Their leaders not only are the oldest and wisest of the band, but also the strongest and bravest, for they must be ready at any time with sheer force to put down an upstart or a rebel. The rank and file are the youngsters and the crows without special gifts.

Old Silverspot was the leader of a large band of crows that made their headquarters near Toronto, Canada, in Castle Frank, which is a pine-clad hill on the northeast edge of the city. This band numbered about two hundred, and for reasons that I never understood did not increase. In mild winters they stayed along the Niagara River; in cold winters they went much farther south. But each year in the last week of February, Old Silverspot would muster his followers and boldly cross the forty miles of open water that lies between Toronto and Niagara; not, however, in a straight line would he go, but always in a curve to the west, whereby he kept in sight of the familiar landmark of Dundas Mountain, until the pine-clad hill itself came in view. Each year he came with his troop, and for about six weeks took up his abode on the hill. Each morning thereafter the crows set out in three bands to forage. One band went southeast to Ashbridge’s Bay. One went north up the Don, and one, the largest, went northwestward up the ravine. The last, Silverspot led in person. Who led the others I never found out.



On calm mornings they flew high and straight away. But when it was windy the band flew low, and followed the ravine for shelter. My windows overlooked the ravine, and it was thus that in 1885 I first noticed this old crow. I was a newcomer in the neighborhood, but an old resident said to me then "that there old crow has been a-flying up and down this ravine for more than twenty years." My chances to watch were in the ravine, and Silverspot doggedly clinging to the old route, though now it was edged with houses and spanned by bridges, became a very familiar acquaintance. Twice each day in March and part of April, then again in the late summer and the fall, he passed and repassed, and gave me chances to see his movements, and hear his orders to his bands, and so, little by little, opened my eyes to the fact that the crows, though a little people, are of great wit, a race of birds with a language and a social system that is wonderfully human in many of its chief points, and in some is better carried out than our own.

One windy day I stood on the high bridge across the ravine, as the old crow, heading his long, straggling troop, came flying down homeward. Half a mile away I could hear the contented *All's well, come right along!* as we should say, or as he put it, and

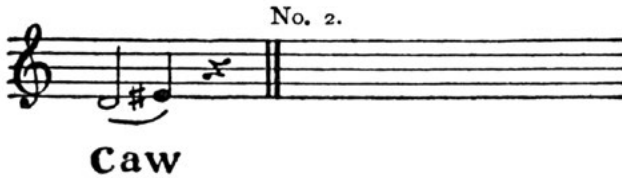
No. 1.



**Caw**

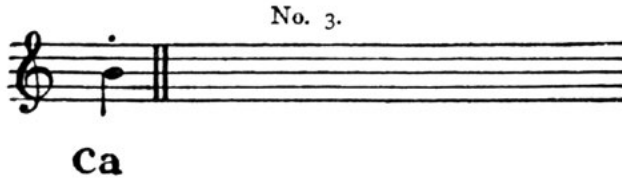
**Caw**

as also his lieutenant echoed it at the rear of the band. They were flying very low to be out of the wind, and would have to rise a little to clear the bridge on which I was. Silverspot saw me standing there, and as I was closely watching him he didn't like it. He checked his flight and called out, '*Be on your guard,*' or



and rose much higher in the air. Then seeing that I was not armed he flew over my head about twenty feet, and his followers in turn did the same, dipping again to the old level when past the bridge.

Next day I was at the same place, and as the crows came near I raised my walking stick and pointed it at them. The old fellow at once cried out '*Danger,*' and rose fifty feet higher than



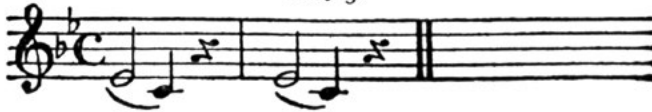
before. Seeing that it was not a gun, he ventured to fly over. But on the third day I took with me a gun, and at once he cried out, '*Great danger—a gun.*' His lieutenant repeated the cry, and every



crow in the troop began to tower and scatter from the rest, till they were far above gun shot, and so passed safely over, coming

down again to the shelter of the valley when well beyond reach. Another time, as the long, straggling troop came down the valley, a red-tailed hawk alighted on a tree close by their intended route. The leader cried out, *'Hawk, hawk,'* and stayed his flight,

No. 5.



**Caw Caw**

as did each crow on nearing him, until all were massed in a solid body. Then, no longer fearing the hawk, they passed on. But a quarter of a mile farther on a man with a gun appeared below, and the cry, *'Great danger—a gun, a—gun; scatter fur your lives,'* at once caused them to scatter widely and tower till far beyond

No. 6.



**ca cacaca Caw**

range. Many others of his words of command I learned in the course of my long acquaintance, and found that sometimes a very little difference in the sound makes a very great difference in meaning. Thus while No. 5 means hawk, or any large, dangerous bird, this means *'wheel around,'* evidently a combination of No.

No. 7.



**Caw Caw cacacaca**

5, whose root idea is danger, and of No. 4, whose root idea is retreat, and this again is a mere *'good day,'* to a far away comrade. This is usually addressed to the ranks and means *'attention.'*

Early in April there began to be great doings among the crows.



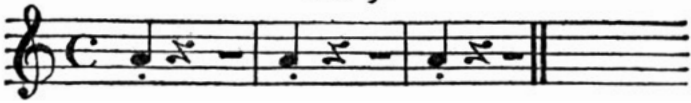
## No. 8.



**Caw Caw**

Some new cause of excitement seemed to have come on them. They spent half the day among the pines, instead of foraging from dawn till dark. Pairs and trios might be seen chasing each other, and from time to time they showed off in various feats of

## No. 9.



flight. A favorite sport was to dart down suddenly from a great height toward some perching crow, and just before touching it to turn at a hairbreadth and rebound in the air so fast that the wings of the swooper whirred with a sound like distant thunder. Sometimes one crow would lower his head, raise every feather, and coming close to another would gurgle out a long note like.

## No. 10.



What did it all mean? I soon learned. They were making love and pairing off. The males were showing off their wing powers and their voices to the lady crows. And they must have been highly appreciated, for by the middle of April all had mated and had scattered over the country for their honeymoon, leaving the sombre old pines of Castle Frank deserted and silent.



## II

The Sugar Loaf hill stands alone in the Don Valley. It is still covered with woods that join with those of Castle Frank, a quarter of a mile off in the woods, between the two hills, is a pine-tree in whose top is a deserted hawk's nest. Every Toronto school-boy knows the nest, and, excepting that I had once shot a black squirrel on its edge, no one had ever seen a sign of life about it. There it was year after year, ragged and old, and falling to pieces. Yet, strange to tell, in all that time it never did drop to pieces, like other old nests.

One morning in May I was out at gray dawn, and stealing gently through the woods, whose dead leaves were so wet that no rustle was made. I chanced to pass under the old nest, and was surprised to see a black tail sticking over the edge. I struck the tree a smart blow, off flew a crow, and the secret was out. I had long suspected that a pair of crows nested each year about the pines, but now I realized that it was Silverspot and his wife. The old nest was theirs, and they were too wise to give it an air of spring-cleaning and housekeeping each year. Here they had nested for long, though guns in the hands of men and boys hungry to shoot crows were carried under their home every day. I never surprised the old fellow again, though I several times saw him through my telescope.

One day while watching I saw a crow crossing the Don Valley with something white in his beak. He flew to the mouth of the Rosedale Brook, then took a short flight to the Beaver Elm. There he dropped the white object, and looking about gave me a chance to recognize my old friend Silverspot. After a min-

ute he picked up the white thing—a shell—and walked over past the spring, and here, among the docks and the skunk-cabbages, he unearthed a pile of shells and other white, shiny things. He spread them out in the sun, turned them over, turned them one by one in his beak, dropped them, nestled on them as though they were eggs, toyed with them and gloated over them like a miser. This was his hobby, his weakness. He could not have explained why he enjoyed them, any more than a boy can explain why he collects postage-stamps, or a girl why she prefers pearls to rubies; but his pleasure in them was very real, and after half an hour he covered them all, including the new one, with earth and leaves, and flew off. I went at once to the spot and examined the hoard; there was about a hatfull in all, chiefly white pebbles, clam-shells, and some bits of tin, but there was also the handle of a china cup, which must have been the gem of the collection. That was the last time I saw them. Silverspot knew that I had found his treasures, and he removed them at once; where, I never knew.

During the space that I watched him so closely he had many little adventures and escapes. He was once





severely handled by a sparrowhawk, and often he was chased and worried by kingbirds. Not that these did him much harm, but they were such noisy pests that he avoided their company as quickly as possible, just as a grown man avoids a conflict with a noisy and impudent small boy. He had some cruel tricks, too. He had a way of going the round of the small birds' nests each morning to eat the new laid eggs, as regularly as a doctor visiting his patients. But we must not judge him for that, as it is just what we ourselves do to the hens in the barnyard.

His quickness of wit was often shown. One day I saw him flying down the ravine with a large piece of bread in his bill. The stream below him was at this time being bricked over as a sewer. There was one part of two hundred yards quite finished, and, as he flew over the open water just above this, the bread fell from his bill, and was swept by the current out of sight into the tunnel. He flew down and peered vainly into the dark cavern, then, acting upon a happy thought, he flew to the downstream end of the tunnel, and awaiting the reappearance of the floating bread, as it was swept onward by the current, he seized and bore it off in triumph.

Silverspot was a crow of the world. He was truly a successful crow. He lived in a region that, though full of dangers, abounded with food. In the old, unrepaired nest he raised a brood each year with his wife, whom, by the way, I never could distinguish, and when the crows again gathered together he was their acknowledged chief.

The reassembling takes place about the end of June—the young crows with their bob-tails, soft wings, and falsetto voices are brought by





THE HANDLE OF A CHINA-CUP, THE GEM OF THE COLLECTION.

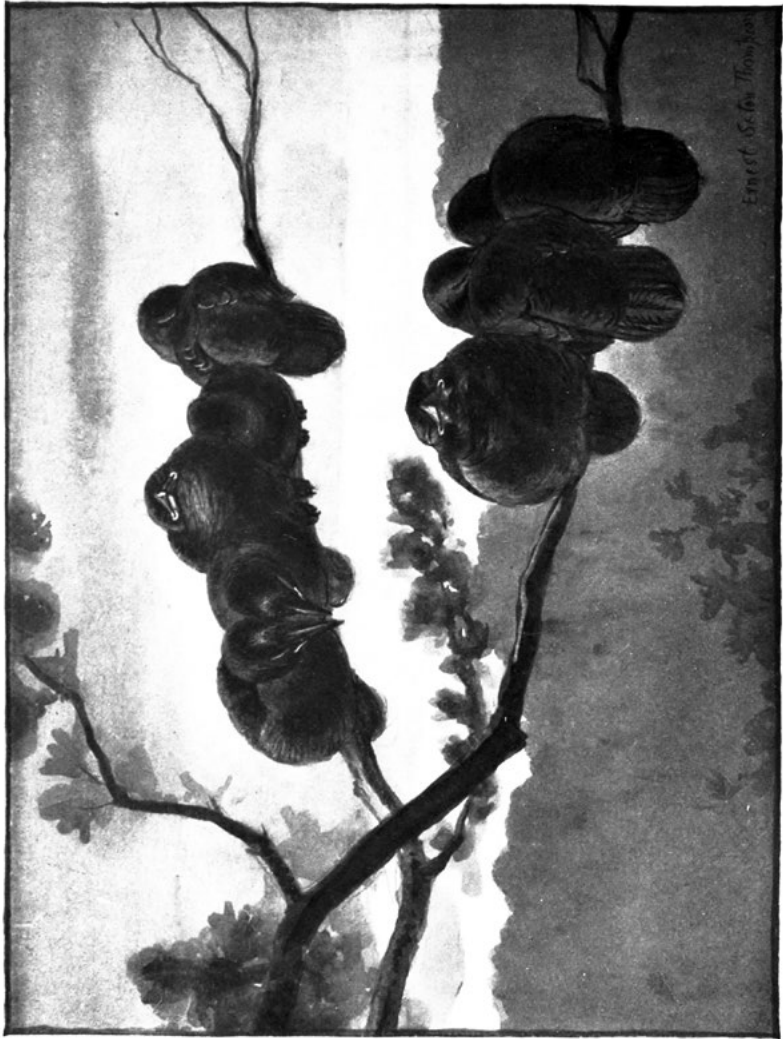


their parents, whom they nearly equal in size, and introduced to society at the old pine woods, a woods that is at once their fortress and college. Here they find security in numbers and in lofty yet sheltered perches, and here they begin their schooling and are taught all the secrets of success in crow life, and in crow life the least failure does not simply mean begin again. It means death.

The first week or two after their arrival is spent by the young ones in getting acquainted, for each crow must know personally all the others in the band. Their parents meanwhile have time to rest a little after the work of raising them, for now the youngsters are able to feed themselves and roost on a branch in a row, just like big folks.

In a week or two the moulting season comes. At this time the old crows are usually irritable and nervous, but it does not stop them from beginning to drill the youngsters, who, of course, do not much enjoy the punishment and nagging they get so soon after they have been mamma's own darlings. But it is all for their good, as the old lady said when she skinned the eels, and old Silverspot is an excellent teacher. Sometimes he seems to make a speech to them. What he says I cannot guess, but judging by the way they receive it, it must be extremely witty. Each morning there is a company drill, for the young ones naturally drop into two or three squads according to their age and strength. The rest of the day they forage with their parents.

When at length September comes we find a great change. The rabble of silly little crows have begun to learn sense. The delicate blue iris of their eyes, the sign of a fool-crow, has given place to



ROOST IN A ROW LIKE BIG FOLKS

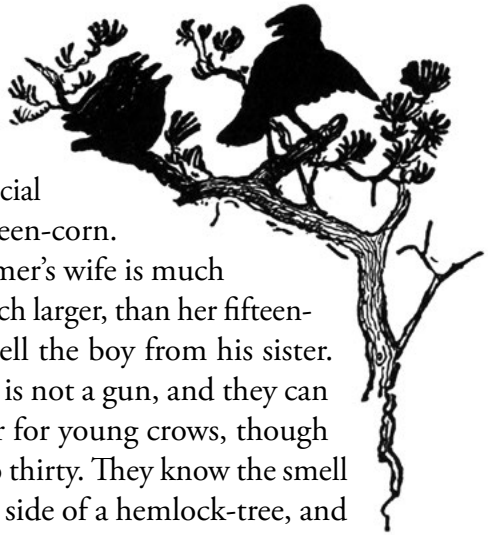
the dark brown eye of the old stager. They know their drill now and have learned sentry duty. They have been taught guns and traps and taken a special course in wireworms and green-corn.

They know that a fat old farmer's wife is much less dangerous, though so much larger, than her fifteen-year-old son, and they can tell the boy from his sister. They know that an umbrella is not a gun, and they can count up to six, which is fair for young crows, though Silverspot can go up nearly to thirty. They know the smell of gunpowder and the south side of a hemlock-tree, and begin to plume themselves upon being crows of the world.

They always fold their wings three times after alighting, to be sure that it is neatly done. They know how to worry a fox into giving up half his dinner, and also that when the kingbird or the purple martin assails them they must dash into a bush, for it is as impossible to fight the little pests as it is for the fat apple-woman to catch the small boys who have raided her basket. All these things do the young crows know; but

they have taken no lessons in egg-hunting yet, for it is not the season. They are unacquainted with clams, and have never tasted horses' eyes, or seen sprouted corn, and they don't know a thing about travel, the greatest educator of all. They did not think of that two months ago, and since then they have thought of it, but have learned to wait till their betters are ready.

September sees a great change in the old crows, too. Their moulting is over. They are now in full feather again and proud of their





handsome coats. Their health is again good, and with it their tempers are improved. Even old Silverspot, the strict teacher, becomes quite jolly, and the youngsters, who have long ago learned to respect him, begin really to love him.



He has hammered away at drill, teaching them all the signals and words of command in use, and now it is a pleasure to see them in the early morning.

'*Company I!*' the old chieftain would cry in crow, and Company I would answer with a great clamor.

'*Fly!*' and himself leading them, they would all fly straight forward.

'*Mount!*' and straight upward they turned in a moment.

'*Bunch!*' and they all massed into a dense black flock.

'*Scatter!*' and they spread out like leaves before the wind.

'*Form line!*' and they strung out into the long line of ordinary flight.

'*Descend!*' and they all dropped nearly to the ground.

'*Forage!*' and they alighted and scattered about to feed, while two of the permanent sentries mounted duty—one on a tree to the right, the other on a mound to the far left. A minute or two later Silverspot would cry out, '*A man with a gun!*' The sentries repeated the cry and the company flew at once in open order as quickly as possible toward the trees. Once behind these, they formed line again in safety and returned to the home pines.

Sentry duty is not taken in turn by all the crows, but a certain number whose watchfulness has been often proved are the perpetual sentries, and are expected to watch and forage at the same time. Rather hard on them it seems to us, but it works well and the crow organization is admitted by all birds to be the very best in existence.



Finally, each November sees the troop sail away southward to learn new modes of life, new landmarks and new kinds of food, under the guidance of the everwise Silverspot.

### III

There is only one time when a crow is a fool, and that is at night. There is only one bird that terrifies the crow, and that is the owl. When, therefore, these come together it is a woeful thing for the sable birds. The distant hoot of an owl after dark is enough to make them withdraw their heads from under their wings, and sit trembling and miserable till morning. In very cold weather the exposure of their faces thus has often resulted in a crow having one or both of his eyes frozen, so that blindness followed and therefore death. There are no hospitals for sick crows.

But with the morning their courage comes again, and arousing themselves they ransack the woods for a mile around till they find that owl, and if they do not kill him they at least worry him half to death and drive him twenty miles away.

In 1893 the crows had come as usual to Castle Frank. I was walking in these woods a few days afterward when I chanced upon the track of a rabbit that had been running at full speed over the snow and dodging about among the trees as though pursued. Strange to tell, I could see no track of the pursuer. I followed the trail and presently saw a drop of blood on the snow, and a little farther on found the partly devoured remains of a little brown bunny. What had killed him was a mystery until a careful search showed in the snow a great double-toed track and a beautifully pencilled brown feather. Then all was clear—a *horned owl*. Half an hour later, in passing again by the place, there, in a tree, within ten feet of the bones of his victim, was the fierce-eyed owl himself. The murderer still hung about the scene of his crime. For once circumstantial evidence had



THE TRACK OF THE MURDERER.

not lied. At my approach he gave a guttural '*grrr-oo*' and flew off with low flagging flight to haunt the distant sombre woods.

Two days afterward, at dawn, there was a great uproar among the crows. I went out early to see, and found some black feathers drifting over the snow. I followed up the wind in the direction from which they came and soon saw the bloody remains of a crow and the great double-toed track which again told me that the murderer was the owl. All around were signs of the struggle, but the fell destroyer was too strong. The poor crow had been dragged from his perch at night, when the darkness had put him at a hopeless disadvantage.

I turned over the remains, and by chance unburied the head—then started with an exclamation of sorrow. Alas! It was the head of old Silverspot. His long life of usefulness to his tribe was over—slain at last by the owl that he had taught so many hundreds of young crows to beware of.

The old nest on the Sugar Loaf is abandoned now. The crows still come in spring-time to Castle Frank, but without their famous leader their numbers are dwindling, and soon they will be seen no more about the old pine-grove in which they and their forefathers had lived and learned for ages.



THE DEATH OF SILVERSPOT.