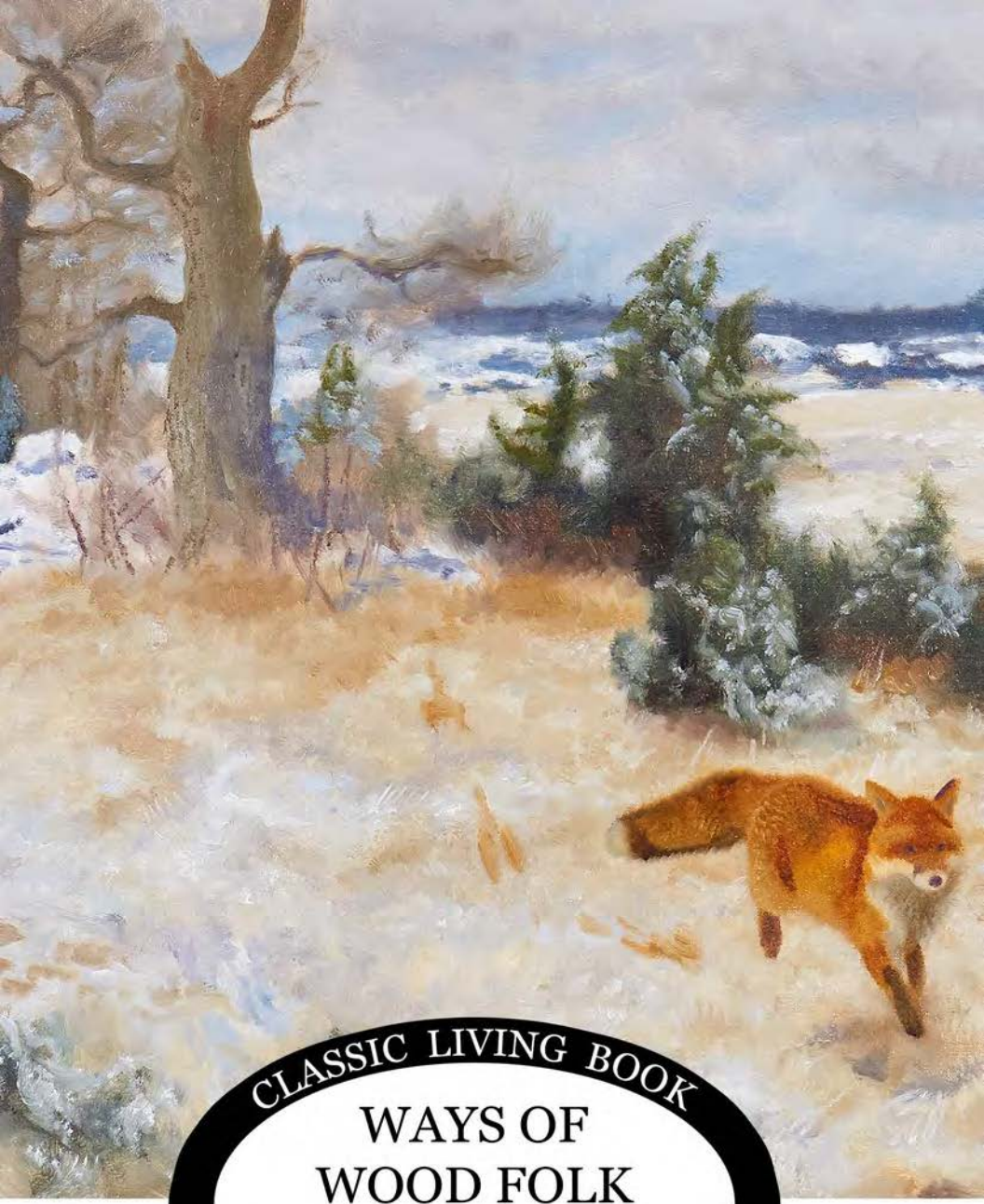

CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

WAYS OF WOOD FOLK

William J. Long

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED


Copeland

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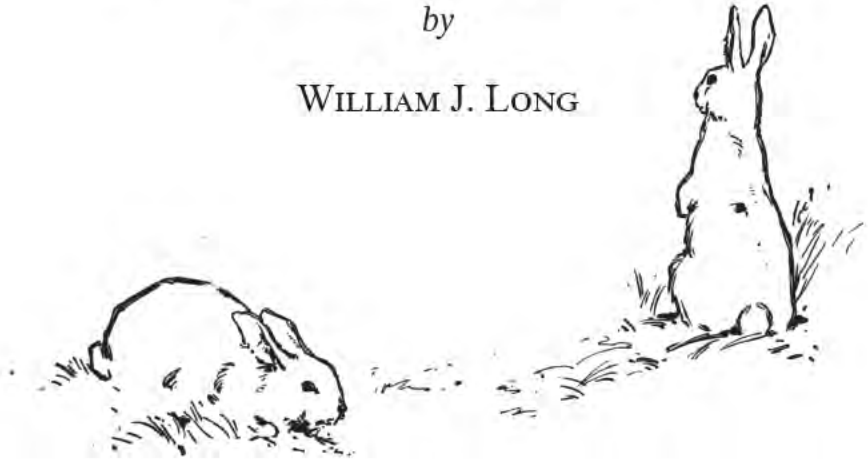
by

WILLIAM J. LONG



LIVING BOOK PRESS

Contents

To Plato, the owl, who looks
over my shoulder as I write, and
who knows all about the woods.

PREFACE.

"All crows are alike," said a wise man, speaking of politicians. That is quite true—in the dark. By daylight, however, there is as much difference, within and without, in the first two crows one meets as in the first two men or women. I asked a little child once, who was telling me all about her chicken, how she knew her chicken from twenty others just like him in the flock. "How do I know my chicken? I know him by his little face," she said. And sure enough, the face, when you looked at it closely, was different from all other faces.

This is undoubtedly true of all birds and all animals. They recognize each other instantly amid multitudes of their kind; and one who watches them patiently sees quite as many odd ways and individualities among Wood Folk as among other people. No matter, therefore, how well you know the habits of crows or the habits of caribou in general, watch the first one that crosses your path as if he were an entire stranger; open eyes to see and heart to interpret, and you will surely find some new thing, some curious unrecorded way, to give delight to your tramp and bring you home with a new interest.

This individuality of the wild creatures will account, perhaps, for many of these Ways, which can seem no more curious or startling to the reader than to the writer when he first discovered them. They are, almost entirely, the records of personal observation in the woods and fields. Occasionally, when I know my hunter or woodsman well, I have taken his testimony, but never without weighing it carefully, and proving it whenever

possible by watching the animal in question for days or weeks till I found for myself that it was all true.

The sketches are taken almost at random from old note-books and summer journals. About them gather a host of associations, of living-over-agains, that have made it a delight to write them; associations of the winter woods, of apple blossoms and nest-building, of New England uplands and wilderness rivers, of camps and canoes, of snowshoes and trout rods, of sunrise on the hills, when one climbed for the eagle's nest, and twilight on the yellow wind-swept beaches, where the surf sobbed far away, and wings twanged like reeds in the wind swooping down to decoys,—all thronging about one, eager to be remembered if not recorded. Among them, most eager, most intense, most frequent of all associations, there is a boy with nerves all a-tingle at the vast sweet mystery that rustled in every wood, following the call of the winds and the birds, or wandering alone where the spirit moved him, who never studied nature consciously, but only loved it, and who found out many of these Ways long ago, guided solely by a boy's instinct.

If they speak to other boys, as to fellow explorers in the always new world, if they bring back to older children happy memories of a golden age when nature and man were not quite so far apart, then there will be another pleasure in having written them.

My thanks are due, and are given heartily, to the editors of *The Youth's Companion* for permission to use several sketches that have already appeared, and to Mr. Charles Copeland, the artist, for his care and interest in preparing the illustrations.

Wm. J. Long.
Andover, Mass., June, 1899.

I. FOX-WAYS.

Did you ever meet a fox face to face, surprising him quite as much as yourself? If so, you were deeply impressed, no doubt, by his perfect dignity and self-possession. Here is how the meeting generally comes about.

It is a late winter afternoon. You are swinging rapidly over the upland pastures, or loitering along the winding old road through the woods. The color deepens in the west; the pines grow black against it; the rich brown of the oak leaves seems to glow everywhere in the last soft light; and the mystery that never sleeps long in the woods begins to rustle again in the thickets. You are busy with your own thoughts, seeing nothing, till a flash of yellow passes before your eyes, and a fox stands in the path before you, one foot uplifted, the fluffy brush swept aside in graceful curve, the bright eyes looking straight into yours—nay, looking through them to read the intent which gives the eyes their expression. That is always the way with a fox; he seems to be looking at your thoughts.

Surprise, eagerness, a lively curiosity are all in your face on the instant; but the beautiful creature before you only draws himself together with quiet self-possession. He lifts his head slightly; a superior look creeps into his eyes; he seems to be speaking. Listen—

"You are surprised?"—this with an almost imperceptible lift of his eyebrows, which reminds you somehow that it is really none of your affair. "O, I frequently use this road in

attending to some matters over in the West Parish. To be sure, we are socially incompatible; we may even regard each other as enemies, unfortunately. I did take your chickens last week; but yesterday your unmannerly dogs hunted me. At least we may meet and pass as gentlemen. You are the older; allow me to give you the path."

Dropping his head again, he turns to the left, English fashion, and trots slowly past you. There is no hurry; not the shadow of suspicion or uneasiness. His eyes are cast down; his brow wrinkled, as if in deep thought; already he seems to have forgotten your existence. You watch him curiously as he reenters the path behind you and disappears over the hill. Somehow a queer feeling, half wonder, half rebuke, steals over you, as if you had been outdone in courtesy, or had passed a gentleman without sufficiently recognizing him.

Ah, but you didn't watch sharply enough! You didn't see, as he circled past, that cunning side gleam of his yellow eyes, which understood your attitude perfectly. Had you stirred, he would have vanished like a flash. You didn't run to the top of the hill where he disappeared, to see that burst of speed the instant he was out of your sight. You didn't see the capers, the tail-chasing, the high jumps, the quick turns and plays; and then the straight, nervous gallop, which told more plainly than words his exultation that he had outwitted you and shown his superiority.

Reynard, wherever you meet him, whether on the old road at twilight, or on the runway before the hounds, impresses you as an animal of dignity and calculation. He never seems surprised, much less frightened; never loses his head; never does things hurriedly, or on the spur of the moment, as a scatter-brained rabbit or meddling squirrel might do. You meet him, perhaps as he leaves the warm rock on the south slope of the old oak woods, where he has

been curled up asleep all the sunny afternoon. (It is easy to find him there in winter.) Now he is off on his nightly hunt; he is trotting along, head down, brows deep-wrinkled, planning it all out.

"Let me see," he is thinking, "last night I hunted the Draper woods. To-night I'll cross the brook just this side the old bars, and take a look into that pasture-corner among the junipers. There's a rabbit which plays round there on moonlight nights; I'll have him presently. Then I'll go down to the big South meadow after mice. I haven't been there for a week; and last time I got six. If I don't find mice, there's that chicken coop of old Jenkins. Only"—He stops, with his foot up, and listens a minute—"only he locks the coop and leaves the dog loose ever since I took the big rooster. Anyway I'll take a look round there. Sometimes Deacon Jones's hens get to roosting in the next orchard. If I can find them up an apple tree, I'll bring a couple down with a good trick I know. On the way—Hi, there!"

In the midst of his planning he gives a grasshopper-jump aside, and brings down both paws hard on a bit of green moss that quivered as he passed. He spreads his paws apart carefully; thrusts his nose down between them; drags a young wood-mouse from under the moss; eats him; licks his chops twice, and goes on planning as if nothing had happened.

"On the way back, I'll swing round by the Fales place, and take a sniff under the wall by the old hickory, to see if those sleepy skunks are still there for the winter. I'll have that whole family before spring, if I'm hungry and can't find anything else. They come out on sunny days; all you have to do is just hide behind the hickory and watch."

So off he goes on his well-planned hunt; and if you follow his track to-morrow in the snow, you will see how he has gone from one hunting ground directly to the next.

You will find the depression where he lay in a clump of tall dead grass and watched a while for the rabbit; reckon the number of mice he caught in the meadow; see his sly tracks about the chicken coop, and in the orchard; and pause a moment at the spot where he cast a knowing look behind the hickory by the wall,—all just as he planned it on his way to the brook.

If, on the other hand, you stand by one of his runways while the dogs are driving him, expecting, of course, to see him come tearing along in a desperate hurry, frightened out of half his wits by the savage uproar behind him, you can only rub your eyes in wonder when a fluffy yellow ball comes drifting through the woods towards you, as if the breeze were blowing it along. There he is, trotting down the runway in the same leisurely, self-possessed way, wrapped in his own thoughts apparently, the same deep wrinkles over his eyes. He played a trick or two on a brook, down between the ponds, by jumping about on a lot of stones from which the snow had melted, without wetting his feet (which he dislikes), and without leaving a track anywhere. While the dogs are puzzling that out, he has plenty of time to plan more devices on his way to the big hill, with its brook, and old walls, and rail fences, and dry places under the pines, and twenty other helps to an active brain.

First he will run round the hill half a dozen times, criss-crossing his trail. That of itself will drive the young dogs crazy. Then along the top rail of a fence, and a long jump into the junipers, which hold no scent, and another jump to the wall where there is no snow, and then—

"Oh, plenty of time, no hurry!" he says to himself, turning to listen a moment. "That dog with the big voice must be old Roby. He thinks he knows all about foxes, just because he broke his leg last year, trying to walk a sheep-fence

where I'd been. I'll give him another chance; and oh, yes! I'll creep up the other side of the hill, and curl up on a warm rock on the tiptop, and watch them all break their heads over the crisscross, and have a good nap or two, and think of more tricks."

So he trots past you, still planning; crosses the wall by a certain stone that he has used ever since he was a cub fox; seems to float across an old pasture, stopping only to run about a bit among some cow tracks, to kill the scent; and so on towards his big hill. Before he gets there he will have a skilful retreat planned, back to the ponds, in case old Roby untangles his crisscross, or some young fool-hound blunders too near the rock whereon he sits, watching the game.

If you meet him now, face to face, you will see no quiet assumption of superiority; unless perchance he is a young fox, that has not learned what it means to be met on a runway by a man with a gun when the dogs are driving. With your first slightest movement there is a flash of yellow fur, and he has vanished into the thickest bit of underbrush at hand.—Don't run; you will not see him again here. He knows the old roads and paths far better than you do, and can reach his big hill by any one of a dozen routes where you would never dream of looking. But if you want another glimpse of him, take the shortest cut to the hill. He may take a nap, or sit and listen a while to the dogs, or run round a swamp before he gets there. Sit on the wall in plain sight; make a post of yourself; keep still, and keep your eyes open.

Once, in just such a place, I had a rare chance to watch him. It was on the summit of a great bare hill. Down in the woods by a swamp, five or six hounds were waking the winter echoes merrily on a fresh trail. I was hoping for a sight of Reynard when he appeared from nowhere, on a

rock not fifty yards away. There he lay, his nose between his paws, listening with quiet interest to the uproar below. Occasionally he raised his head as some young dog scurried near, yelping maledictions upon a perfect tangle of fox tracks, none of which went anywhere. Suddenly he sat up straight, twisted his head sideways, as a dog does when he sees the most interesting thing of his life, dropped his tongue out a bit, and looked intently. I looked too, and there, just below, was old Roby, the best foxhound in a dozen counties, creeping like a cat along the top rail of a sheep-fence, now putting his nose down to the wood, now throwing his head back for a great howl of exultation.—It was all immensely entertaining; and nobody seemed to be enjoying it more than the fox.

One of the most fascinating bits of animal study is to begin at the very beginning of fox education, *i.e.*, to find a fox den, and go there some afternoon in early June, and hide at a distance, where you can watch the entrance through your field-glass. Every afternoon the young foxes come out to play in the sunshine like so many kittens. Bright little bundles of yellow fur they seem, full of tricks and whims, with pointed faces that change only from exclamation to interrogation points, and back again. For hours at a stretch they roll about, and chase tails, and pounce upon the quiet old mother with fierce little barks. One climbs laboriously up the rock behind the den, and sits on his tail, gravely surveying the great landscape with a comical little air of importance, as if he owned it all. When called to come down he is afraid, and makes a great to-do about it. Another has been crouching for five minutes behind a tuft of grass, watching like a cat at a rat-hole for some one to come by and be pounced upon. Another is worrying something on the ground, a cricket perhaps, or a doodlebug; and the fourth never ceases to worry the patient old

mother, till she moves away and lies down by herself in the shadow of a ground cedar.

As the afternoon wears away, and long shadows come creeping up the hillside, the mother rises suddenly and goes back to the den; the little ones stop their play, and gather about her. You strain your ears for the slightest sound, but hear nothing; yet there she is, plainly talking to them; and they are listening. She turns her head, and the cubs scamper into the den's mouth. A moment she stands listening, looking; while just within the dark entrance you get glimpses of four pointed black noses, and a cluster of bright little eyes, wide open for a last look. Then she trots away, planning her hunt, till she disappears down by the brook. When she is gone, eyes and noses draw back; only a dark silent hole in the bank is left. You will not see them again—not unless you stay to watch by moonlight till mother-fox comes back, with a fringe of field-mice hanging from her lips, or a young turkey thrown across her shoulders.

One shrewd thing frequently noticed in the conduct of an old fox with young is that she never troubles the poultry of the farms nearest her den. She will forage for miles in every direction; will harass the chickens of distant farms till scarcely a handful remains of those that wander into the woods, or sleep in the open yards; yet she will pass by and through nearer farms without turning aside to hunt, except for mice and frogs; and, even when hungry, will note a flock of chickens within sight of her den, and leave them undisturbed. She seems to know perfectly that a few missing chickens will lead to a search; that boys' eyes will speedily find her den, and boys' hands dig eagerly for a litter of young foxes.

Last summer I found a den, beautifully hidden, within a few hundred yards of an old farmhouse. The farmer

assured me he had never missed a chicken; he had no idea that there was a fox within miles of his large flock. Three miles away was another farmer who frequently sat up nights, and set his boys to watching afternoons, to shoot a fox that, early and late, had taken nearly thirty young chickens. Driven to exasperation at last, he borrowed a hound from a hunter; and the dog ran the trail straight to the den I had discovered.

Curiously enough, the cubs, for whose peaceful bringing up the mother so cunningly provides, do not imitate her caution. They begin their hunting by lying in ambush about the nearest farm; the first stray chicken they see is game. Once they begin to plunder in this way, and feed full on their own hunting, parental authority is gone; the mother deserts the den immediately, leading the cubs far away. But some of them go back, contrary to all advice, and pay the penalty. She knows now that sooner or later some cub will be caught stealing chickens in broad daylight, and be chased by dogs. The foolish youngster takes to earth, instead of trusting to his legs; so the long-concealed den is discovered and dug open at last.

When an old fox, foraging for her young some night, discovers by her keen nose that a flock of hens has been straying near the woods, she goes next day and hides herself there, lying motionless for hours at a stretch in a clump of dead grass or berry bushes, till the flock comes near enough for a rush. Then she hurls herself among them, and in the confusion seizes one by the neck, throws it by a quick twist across her shoulders, and is gone before the stupid hens find out what it is all about.

But when a fox finds an old hen or turkey straying about with a brood of chicks, then the tactics are altogether different. Creeping up like a cat, the fox watches an opportunity to seize a chick out of sight of the mother bird. That done,

he withdraws, silent as a shadow, his grip on the chick's neck preventing any outcry. Hiding his game at a distance, he creeps back to capture another in the same way; and so on till he has enough, or till he is discovered, or some half-strangled chick finds breath enough for a squawk. A hen or turkey knows the danger by instinct, and hurries her brood into the open at the first suspicion that a fox is watching.

A farmer, whom I know well, first told me how a fox manages to carry a number of chicks at once. He heard a clamor from a hen-turkey and her brood one day, and ran to a wood path in time to see a vixen make off with a turkey chick scarcely larger than a robin. Several were missing from the brood. He hunted about, and presently found five more just killed. They were beautifully laid out, the bodies at a broad angle, the necks crossing each other, like the corner of a corn-cob house, in such a way that, by gripping the necks at the angle, all the chicks could be carried at once, half hanging at either side of the fox's mouth. Since then I have seen an old fox with what looked like a dozen or more field-mice carried in this way; only, of course, the tails were crossed corn-cob fashion instead of the necks.

The stealthiness with which a fox stalks his game is one of the most remarkable things about him. Stupid chickens are not the only birds captured. Once I read in the snow the story of his hunt after a crow—wary game to be caught napping! The tracks showed that quite a flock of crows had been walking about an old field, bordered by pine and birch thickets. From the rock where he was sleeping away the afternoon the fox saw or heard them, and crept down. How cautious he was about it! Following the tracks, one could almost see him stealing along from stone to bush, from bush to grass clump, so low that his

body pushed a deep trail in the snow, till he reached the cover of a low pine on the very edge of the field. There he crouched with all four feet close together under him. Then a crow came by within ten feet of the ambush. The tracks showed that the bird was a bit suspicious; he stopped often to look and listen. When his head was turned aside for an instant the fox launched himself; just two jumps, and he had him. Quick as he was, the wing marks showed that the crow had started, and was pulled down out of the air. Reynard carried him into the densest thicket of scrub pines he could find, and ate him there, doubtless to avoid the attacks of the rest of the flock, which followed him screaming vengeance.

A strong enmity exists between crows and foxes. Wherever a crow finds a fox, he sets up a clatter that draws a flock about him in no time, in great excitement. They chase the fox as long as he is in sight, cawing vociferously, till he creeps into a thicket of scrub pines, into which no crow will ever venture, and lies down till he tires out their patience. In hunting, one may frequently trace the exact course of a fox which the dogs are driving, by the crows clamoring over him. Here in the snow was a record that may help explain one side of the feud.

From the same white page one may read many other stories of Reynard's ways and doings. Indeed I know of no more interesting winter walk than an afternoon spent on his last night's trail through the soft snow. There is always something new, either in the track or the woods through which it leads; always a fresh hunting story; always a disappointment or two, a long cold wait for a rabbit that didn't come, or a miscalculation over the length of the snow tunnel where a partridge burrowed for the night. Generally, if you follow far enough, there is also a story of good hunting which leaves you wavering between congratulation over a

successful stalk after nights of hungry, patient wandering, and pity for the little tragedy told so vividly by converging trails, a few red drops in the snow, a bit of fur blown about by the wind, or a feather clinging listlessly to the underbrush. In such a tramp one learns much of fox-ways and other ways that can never be learned elsewhere.

The fox whose life has been spent on the hillsides surrounding a New England village seems to have profited by generations of experience. He is much more cunning every way than the fox of the wilderness. If, for instance, a fox has been stealing your chickens, your trap must be very cunningly set if you are to catch him. It will not do to set it near the chickens; no inducement will be great enough to bring him within yards of it. It must be set well back in the woods, near one of his regular hunting grounds. Before that, however, you must bait the fox with choice bits scattered over a pile of dry leaves or chaff, sometimes for a week, sometimes for a month, till he comes regularly. Then smoke your trap, or scent it; handle it only with gloves; set it in the chaff; scatter bait as usual; and you have one chance of getting him, while he has still a dozen of getting away. In the wilderness, on the other hand, he may be caught with half the precaution. I know a little fellow, whose home is far back from the settlements, who catches five or six foxes every winter by ordinary wire snares set in the rabbit paths, where foxes love to hunt.

In the wilderness one often finds tracks in the snow, telling how a fox tried to catch a partridge and only succeeded in frightening it into a tree. After watching a while hungrily,—one can almost see him licking his chops under the tree,—he trots off to other hunting grounds. If he were an educated fox he would know better than that.

When an old New England fox in some of his nightly prowlings discovers a flock of chickens roosting in the

orchard, he generally gets one or two. His plan is to come by moonlight, or else just at dusk, and, running about under the tree, bark sharply to attract the chickens' attention. If near the house, he does this by jumping, lest the dog or the farmer hear his barking. Once they have begun to flutter and cackle, as they always do when disturbed, he begins to circle the tree slowly, still jumping and clacking his teeth. The chickens crane their necks down to follow him. Faster and faster he goes, racing in small circles, till some foolish fowl grows dizzy with twisting her head, or loses her balance and tumbles down, only to be snapped up and carried off across his shoulders in a twinkling.

But there is one way in which fox of the wilderness and fox of the town are alike easily deceived. Both are very fond of mice, and respond quickly to the squeak, which can be imitated perfectly by drawing the breath in sharply between closed lips. The next thing, after that is learned, is to find a spot in which to try the effect.

Two or three miles back from almost all New England towns are certain old pastures and clearings, long since run wild, in which the young foxes love to meet and play on moonlight nights, much as rabbits do, though in a less harum-scarum way. When well fed, and therefore in no hurry to hunt, the heart of a young fox turns naturally to such a spot, and to fun and capers. The playground may easily be found by following the tracks after the first snowfall. (The knowledge will not profit you probably till next season; but it is worth finding and remembering.) If one goes to the place on some still, bright night in autumn, and hides on the edge of the open, he stands a good chance of seeing two or three foxes playing there. Only he must himself be still as the night; else, should twenty foxes come that way, he will never see one.

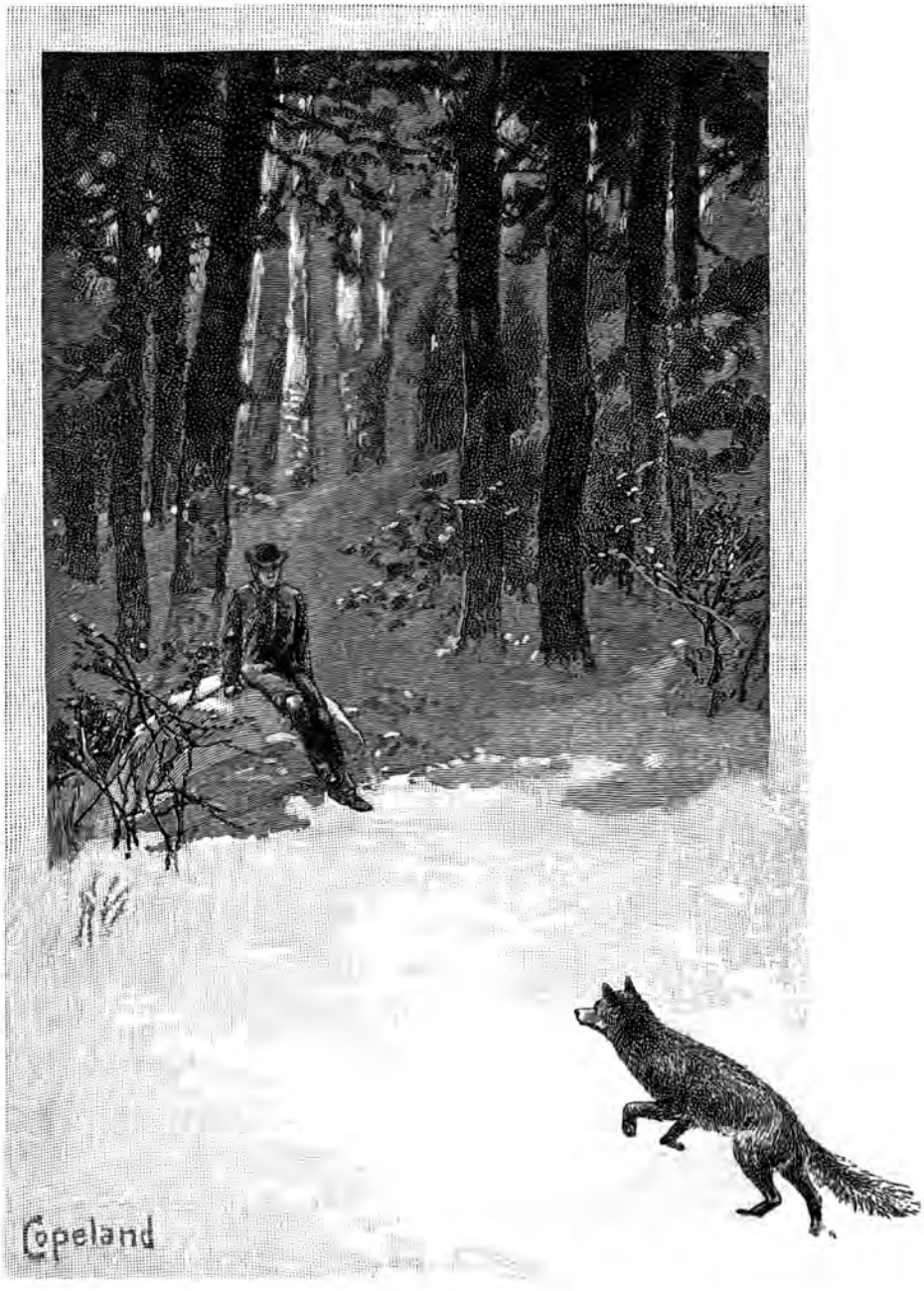
It is always a pretty scene, the quiet opening in the

woods flecked with soft gray shadows in the moonlight, the dark sentinel evergreens keeping silent watch about the place, the wild little creatures playing about among the junipers, flitting through light and shadow, jumping over each other and tumbling about in mimic warfare, all unconscious of a spectator as the foxes that played there before the white man came, and before the Indians. Such scenes do not crowd themselves upon one. He must wait long, and love the woods, and be often disappointed; but when they come at last, they are worth all the love and the watching. And when the foxes are not there, there is always something else that is beautiful.—

Now squeak like a mouse, in the midst of the play. Instantly the fox nearest you stands, with one foot up, listening. Another squeak, and he makes three or four swift bounds in your direction, only to stand listening again; he hasn't quite located you. Careful now! don't hurry; the longer you keep him waiting, the more certainly he is deceived. Another squeak; some more swift jumps that bring him within ten feet; and now he smells or sees you, sitting motionless on your boulder in the shadow of the pines.

He isn't surprised; at least he pretends he isn't; but looks you over indifferently, as if he were used to finding people sitting on that particular rock. Then he trots off with an air of having forgotten something. With all his cunning he never suspects you of being the mouse. That little creature he believes to be hiding under the rock; and to-morrow night he will very likely take a look there, or respond to your squeak in the same way.

It is only early in the season, generally before the snow blows, that one can see them playing; and it is probably the young foxes that are so eager for this kind of fun. Later in the season—either because the cubs have lost their playful-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ness, or because they must hunt so diligently for enough to eat that there is no time for play—they seldom do more than take a gallop together, with a playful jump or two, before going their separate ways. At all times, however, they have a strong tendency to fun and mischief-making. More than once, in winter, I have surprised a fox flying round after his own bushy tail so rapidly that tail and fox together looked like a great yellow pin-wheel on the snow.

When a fox meets a toad or frog, and is not hungry, he worries the poor thing for an hour at a time; and when he finds a turtle he turns the creature over with his paw, sitting down gravely to watch its awkward struggle to get back onto its feet. At such times he has a most humorous expression, brows wrinkled and tongue out, as if he were enjoying himself hugely.

Later in the season he would be glad enough to make a meal of toad or turtle. One day last March the sun shone out bright and warm; in the afternoon the first frogs began to tune up, *cr-r-r-runk, cr-r-runk-a-runk-runk*, like a flock of brant in the distance. I was watching them at a marshy spot in the woods, where they had come out of the mud by dozens into a bit of open water, when the bushes parted cautiously and the sharp nose of a fox appeared. The hungry fellow had heard them from the hill above, where he was asleep, and had come down to see if he could catch a few. He was creeping out onto the ice when he smelled me, and trotted back into the woods.

Once I saw him catch a frog. He crept down to where Chigwooltz, a fat green bullfrog, was sunning himself by a lily pad, and very cautiously stretched out one paw under water. Then with a quick fling he tossed his game to land, and was after him like a flash before he could scramble back.

On the seacoast Reynard depends largely on the tides for a living. An old fisherman assures me that he has seen

him catching crabs there in a very novel way. Finding a quiet bit of water where the crabs are swimming about, he trails his brush over the surface till one rises and seizes it with his claw (a most natural thing for a crab to do), whereupon the fox springs away, jerking the crab to land. Though a fox ordinarily is careful as a cat about wetting his tail or feet, I shall not be surprised to find some day for myself that the fisherman was right. Reynard is very ingenious, and never lets his little prejudices stand in the way when he is after a dinner.

His way of beguiling a duck is more remarkable than his fishing. Late one afternoon, while following the shore of a pond, I noticed a commotion among some tame ducks, and stopped to see what it was about. They were swimming in circles, quacking and stretching their wings, evidently in great excitement. A few minutes' watching convinced me that something on the shore excited them. Their heads were straight up from the water, looking fixedly at something that I could not see; every circle brought them nearer the bank. I walked towards them, not very cautiously, I am sorry to say; for the farmhouse where the ducks belonged was in plain sight, and I was not expecting anything unusual. As I glanced over the bank something slipped out of sight into the tall grass. I followed the waving tops intently, and caught one sure glimpse of a fox as he disappeared into the woods.

The thing puzzled me for years, though I suspected some foxy trick, till a duck-hunter explained to me what Reynard was doing. He had seen it tried successfully once on a flock of wild ducks.—

When a fox finds a flock of ducks feeding near shore, he trots down and begins to play on the beach in plain sight, watching the birds the while out of the "tail o' his ee," as a Scotchman would say. Ducks are full of curios-

ity, especially about unusual colors and objects too small to frighten them; so the playing animal speedily excites a lively interest. They stop feeding, gather close together, spread, circle, come together again, stretching their necks as straight as strings to look and listen.

Then the fox really begins his performance. He jumps high to snap at imaginary flies; he chases his bushy tail; he rolls over and over in clouds of flying sand; he gallops up the shore, and back like a whirlwind; he plays peekaboo with every bush. The foolish birds grow excited; they swim in smaller circles, quacking nervously, drawing nearer and nearer to get a better look at the strange performance. They are long in coming, but curiosity always gets the better of them; those in the rear crowd the front rank forward. All the while the show goes on, the performer paying not the slightest attention apparently to his excited audience; only he draws slowly back from the water's edge, as if to give them room as they crowd nearer.

They are on shore at last; then, while they are lost in the most astonishing caper of all, the fox dashes among them, throwing them into the wildest confusion. His first snap never fails to throw a duck back onto the sand with a broken neck; and he has generally time for a second, often for a third, before the flock escapes into deep water. Then he buries all his birds but one, throws that across his shoulders, and trots off, wagging his head, to some quiet spot where he can eat his dinner and take a good nap undisturbed.

When with all his cunning Reynard is caught napping, he makes use of another good trick he knows. One winter morning some years ago, my friend, the old fox-hunter, rose at daylight for a run with the dogs over the new-fallen snow. Just before calling his hounds, he went to his hen-house, some distance away, to throw the chickens some

corn for the day. As he reached the roost, his steps making no sound in the snow, he noticed the trail of a fox crossing the yard and entering the coop through a low opening sometimes used by the chickens. No trail came out; it flashed upon him that the fox must be inside at that moment.

Hardly had he reached this conclusion when a wild cackle arose that left no doubt about it. On the instant he whirled an empty box against the opening, at the same time pounding lustily to frighten the thief from killing more chickens. Reynard was trapped sure enough. The fox-hunter listened at the door, but save for an occasional surprised *cut-aa-cut*, not a sound was heard within.

Very cautiously he opened the door and squeezed through. There lay a fine pullet stone dead; just beyond lay the fox, dead too.

"Well, of all things," said the fox-hunter, open-mouthed, "if he hasn't gone and climbed the roost after that pullet, and then tumbled down and broken his own neck!"

Highly elated with this unusual beginning of his hunt, he picked up the fox and the pullet and laid them down together on the box outside, while he fed his chickens.

When he came out, a minute later, there was the box and a feather or two, but no fox and no pullet. Deep tracks led out of the yard and up over the hill in flying jumps. Then it dawned upon our hunter that Reynard had played the possum-game on him, getting away with a whole skin and a good dinner.

There was no need to look farther for a good fox track. Soon the music of the hounds went ringing over the hill and down the hollow; but though the dogs ran true, and the hunter watched the runways all day with something more than his usual interest, he got no glimpse of the wily old fox. Late at night the dogs came limping home, weary

and footsore, but with never a long yellow hair clinging to their chops to tell a story.

The fox saved his pullet, of course. Finding himself pursued, he buried it hastily, and came back the next night undoubtedly to get it.

Several times since then I have known of his playing possum in the same way. The little fellow whom I mentioned as living near the wilderness, and snaring foxes, once caught a black fox—a rare, beautiful animal with a very valuable skin—in a trap which he had baited for weeks in a wild pasture. It was the first black fox he had ever seen, and, boylike, he took it only as a matter of mild wonder to find the beautiful creature frozen stiff, apparently, on his pile of chaff with one hind leg fast in the trap.

He carried the prize home, trap and all, over his shoulder. At his whoop of exultation the whole family came out to admire and congratulate. At last he took the trap from the fox's leg, and stretched him out on the doorstep to gloat over the treasure and stroke the glossy fur to his heart's content. His attention was taken away for a moment; then he had a dazed vision of a flying black animal that seemed to perch an instant on the log fence and vanish among the spruces.

Poor Johnnie! There were tears in his eyes when he told me about it, three years afterwards.

These are but the beginning of fox-ways. I have not spoken of his occasional tree climbing; nor of his grasshopper hunting; nor of his planning to catch three quails at once when he finds a whole covey gathered into a dinner-plate circle, tails in, heads out, asleep on the ground; nor of some perfectly astonishing things he does when hard pressed by dogs. But these are enough to begin the study and still leave plenty of things to find out for one's self. Reynard is rarely seen, even in places where he abounds; we know

almost nothing of his private life; and there are undoubtedly many of his most interesting ways yet to be discovered. He has somehow acquired a bad name, especially among farmers; but, on the whole, there is scarcely a wild thing in the woods that better repays one for the long hours spent in catching a glimpse of him.