AMONG THE NIGHT PEOPLE

COLLIE CHASED HIM AWAY.

AMONG THE NIGHT PEOPLE

BY

CLARA DILLINGHAM PIERSON

Author of "Among the Meadow People," "Pond People," etc.

YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS

CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA

This edition, first published in 2005 by Yesterday's Classics, is an unabridged republication of the work originally published by E. P. Dutton and Company in 1902. The color illustrations by F. C. Gordon in that volume are rendered in black and white in this edition. For a listing of books published by Yesterday's Classics, visit www.yesterdaysclassics.com. Yesterday's Classics is the publishing arm of the Baldwin Project which presents the complete text of dozens of classic books for children at www.mainlesson.com under the editorship of Lisa M. Ripperton and T. A. Roth.

ISBN-10: 1-59915-020-4

ISBN-13: 978-1-59915-020-8

Yesterday's Classics
PO Box 3418
Chapel Hill, NC 27515

TO

RACHEL W. PIERSON

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

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MY DEAR LITTLE FRIENDS:—You can never guess how much I have enjoyed writing these stories of the night-time, and I must tell you how I first came to think of doing so. I once knew a girl—and she was not a very little girl, either,—who was afraid of the dark. And I have known three boys who were as brave as could be by daylight, but who would not run on an errand alone after the lamps were lighted. They never seemed to think what a beautiful, restful, growing time the night is for plants and animals, and even for themselves. I thought that if they knew more of what happens between sunset and sunrise they would love the night as well as I.

It may be that you will never see Bats flying freely, or find the Owls flapping silently among the trees without touching even a twig. Perhaps while these things are happening you must be snugly tucked in bed. But that is no reason why you should not be told what they do while you are dreaming. Before this, you know, I have told you more of what is done by daylight in meadow, forest, farmyard, and pond. It would be a very queer world if we could not know about things without seeing them for ourselves, and you may like to think, when you are going to sleep, that hundreds and thousands of tiny

out-of-door people are turning, and stretching, and going to find their food. In the morning, when you are dressing in your sunshiny rooms, they are cuddling down for a good day's rest.

I think I ought to tell you that I have not been alone when writing these stories. I have often been in the meadow and the forest at night, and have seen and heard many interesting things, but my good Cat, Silvertip, has known far more than I of the night-doings of the out-of-door people. He has been beside me at my desk, and although at times he has shut his eyes and taken Cat-naps while I wrote, there have been many other times when he has taken the pen right out of my hand. He has even tried running the typewriter with his dainty white paws, and he has gone over every story that I have written. I do not say that he has written any himself, but you can see that he has been very careful what I wrote, and I have learned a great deal from him that I never knew before. He is a very good and clever Cat, and if you like these stories I am sure it must be partly because he had a paw in the writing of them.

Your friend,
CLARA D. PIERSON.

STANTON, MICHIGAN,
April 15th, 1901.

THE BLACK SPANISH CHICKENS

WHEN the Speckled Hen wanted to sit there was no use in trying to talk her out of the idea, for she was a very set Hen. So, after the farmer's wife had worked and worked, and barred her out of first one nesting-place and then another, she gave up to the Speckled Hen and fixed her a fine nest and put thirteen eggs into it. They were Black Spanish eggs, but the Speckled Hen did not know that. The Hens that had laid them could not bear to sit, so, unless some other Hen did the work which they left undone, there would have been no Black Spanish Chickens. This is always their way, and people have grown used to it. Now nobody thinks of asking a Black Spanish Hen to sit, although it does not seem right that a Hen should be unwilling to bring up chickens. Supposing nobody had been willing to bring her up?

Still, the Black Spanish Hens talk very reasonably about it. "We will lay plenty of eggs," they say, "but some of the common Hens must hatch them." They do their share of the farmyard

work, only they insist on choosing what that share shall be.

When the Speckled Hen came off the nest with eleven Black Chickens (two of the eggs did not hatch), she was not altogether happy. "I wanted them to be speckled," said she, "and not one of the whole brood is." That was why she grew so restless and discontented in her coop, although it was roomy and clean and she had plenty given her to eat and drink. She was quite happy only when they were safely under her wings at night. And such a time as they always had getting settled!

When the sunbeams came more and more slantingly through the trees, the Chickens felt less and less like running around. Their tiny legs were tired and they liked to cuddle down on the grass in the shadow of the coop. Then the Speckled Hen often clucked to them to come in and rest, but they liked it better in the open air. The Speckled Hen would also have liked to be out of the coop, yet the farmer kept her in. He knew what was best for Hens with little Chickens, and also what was best for the tender young lettuce and radishes in his garden.

When the sun was nearly down, the Speckled Hen clucked her come-to-bed cluck, which was quite different from her food cluck or her Hawk cluck, and the little Black Chickens ran between the bars and crawled under her feathers. Then the Speckled Hen began to look fatter and fatter and fatter for each Chicken who nestled beneath her. Sometimes one little fellow would scramble up on to her back

and stand there, while she turned her head from side to side, looking at him with first one and then the other of her round yellow eyes, and scolding him all the time. It never did any good to scold, but she said she had to do something, and with ten other children under her wings it would never do for her to stand up and tumble him off.

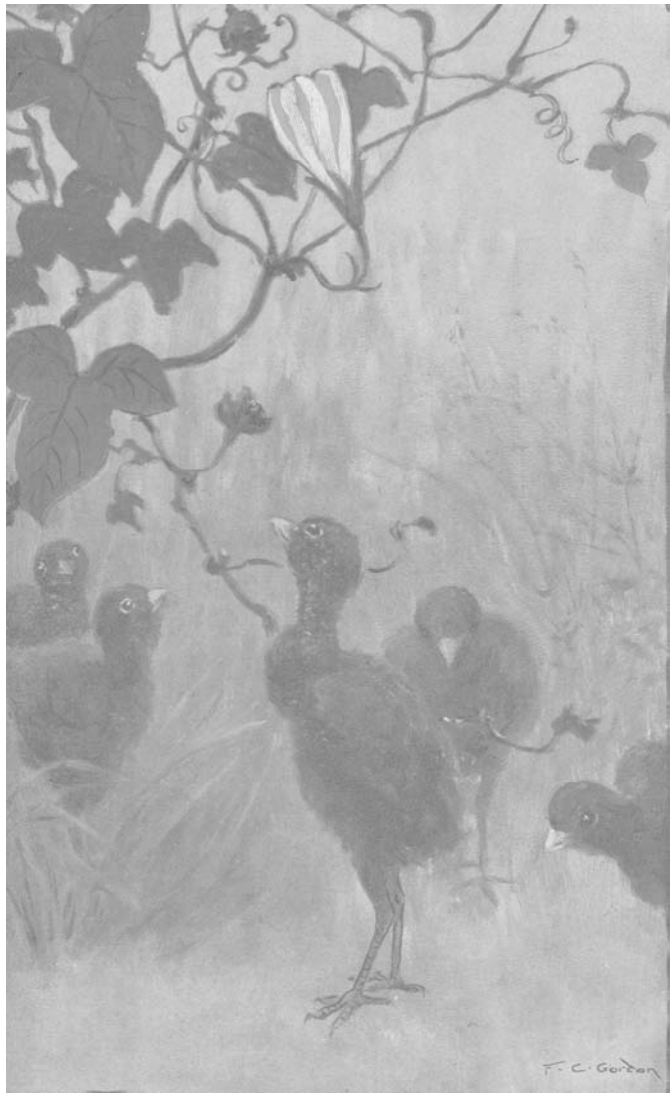
All the time that they were getting settled for the night the Chickens were talking in sleepy little cheeps, and now and then one of them would poke his head out between the feathers and tell the Speckled Hen that somebody was pushing him. Then she would be more puzzled than ever and cluck louder still. Sometimes, too, the Chickens would run out for another mouthful of cornmeal mush or a few more drops of water. There was one little fellow who always wanted something to drink just when he should have been going to sleep. The Speckled Hen used to say that it took longer for a mouthful of water to run down his throat than it would for her to drink the whole panful. Of course it did take quite a while, because he couldn't hurry it by swallowing. He had to drink, as all birds do, by filling his beak with water and then holding it up until the last drop had trickled down into his stomach.

When the whole eleven were at last safely tucked away for the night, the Speckled Hen was tired but happy. "They are good children," she often said to herself, "if they are Black Spanish. They might be just as mischievous if they were speckled; still, I do wish that those stylish-looking, white-eared Black Spanish Hens would raise their own broods. I

don't like to be hatch-mother to other Hens' chickens." Then she would slide her eyelids over her eyes, and doze off, and dream that they were all speckled like herself.

There came a day when the coop was raised and they were free to go where they chose. There was a fence around the vegetable garden now and netting around the flower-beds, but there were other lovely places for scratching up food, for nipping off tender young green things, for picking up the fine gravel which every Chicken needs, and for wallowing in the dust. Then the Black Spanish Chickens became acquainted with the other fowls whom they had never met before. They were rather afraid of the Shanghai Cock because he had such a gruff way of speaking, and they liked the Dorkings, yet the ones they watched and admired and talked most about were the Black Spanish Cock and Hen. There were many fowls on the farm who did not have family names, and the Speckled Hen was one of these. They had been there longer than the rest and did not really like having new people come to live in the poultry-yard. It was trying, too, when the older Hens had to hatch the eggs laid by the newcomers.

It is said that this was what made the Speckled Hen leave the eleven little Black Spanish Chickens after she had been out of the coop for a while. They had been very mischievous and disobedient one day, and she walked off and left them to care for themselves while she started to raise a family of her own in a stolen nest under the straw-stack.



THEY WERE FREE TO GO WHERE THEY CHOSE.

When night came, eleven little Black Spanish Chickens did not know what to do. They went to look for their old coop, but that had been given to another Hen and her family. They walked around looking very small and lonely, and wished they had minded the Speckled Hen and made her love them more. At last they found an old potato-crate which reminded them of a coop and so seemed rather homelike. It stood, top down, upon the ground and they were too big to crawl through its barred sides, so they did the best they could and huddled together on top of it. If there had not been a stone-heap near, they could not have done that, for their wing-feathers were not yet large enough to help them flutter. The bravest Chicken went first, picking his way from stone to stone until he reached the highest one, balancing himself awhile on that, stretching his neck toward the potato-crate, looking at it as though he were about to jump, and then seeming to change his mind and decide not to do so after all.

The Chickens on the ground said he was afraid, and he said he wasn't any more afraid than they were. Then, after a while, he did jump, a queer, floppy, squawky kind of jump, but it landed him where he wanted to be. After that it was his turn to laugh at the others while they stood teetering uncertainly on the top stone. They were very lonely without the Speckled Hen, and each Chicken wanted to be in the middle of the group to keep him warm on all sides.

Somebody laughed at the most mischievous Chicken and told him he could stand on the potato-

crate's back without being scolded, and he pouted his bill and said: "Much fun that would be! All I cared about standing on the Speckled Hen's back was to make her scold!" It is very shocking that he should say such things, but he did say exactly that.

They slept safely that night, and only awakened when the Cocks crowed a little while after midnight. After that they slept until sunrise, and when the Shanghais and Dorkings came down from the apple-tree where they had been roosting, the Black Spanish Chickens stirred and cheeped, and looked at their feathers to see how much they had grown during the night. Then they pushed and squabbled for their breakfast.

Every night they came back to sleep on the potato-crate. At last they were able to spring up into their places without standing on the stone-pile, and that was a great day. They talked about it long after they should have been asleep, and were still chattering when the Shanghai Cock spoke: "If you Black Spanish Chickens don't keep still and let us sleep," said he, "some Owl or Weasel will come for you, and I shall be glad to have him!"

That scared the Chickens and they were very quiet. It made the Black Spanish Hen uneasy though, and she whispered to the Black Spanish Cock and wouldn't let him sleep until he had promised to fight anybody who might try to carry one of the Chickens away from the potato-crate.

The next night first one Chicken and then another kept tumbling off the potato-crate. They lost

their patience and said such things as these to each other:

"You pushed me! You know you did!"

"Well, he pushed me!"

"Didn't either!"

"Did too!"

"Well, I couldn't help it if I did!"

The Shanghai Cock became exceedingly cross because they made so much noise, and even the Black Spanish Cock lost his patience. "You may be my children," said he, "but you do not take your manners from me. Is there no other place on this farm where you can sleep excepting that old crate?"

"We want to sleep here," answered the Chicken on the ground. "There is plenty of room if those fellows wouldn't push." Then he flew up and clung and pushed until some other Chicken tumbled off.

"Well!" said the Black Spanish Cock. And he would have said much more if the Black Spanish Hen had not fluttered down from the apple-tree to see what was the matter. When he saw the expression of her eyes he decided to go back to his perch.

"There is not room for you all," said the Black Spanish Hen. "One must sleep somewhere else."

"There *is* room," said the Chickens, contradicting her. "We have always roosted on here."

"There is *not* room," said the Black Spanish Hen once more. "How do your feathers grow?"

"Finely," said they.

"And your feet?"

"They are getting very big," was the answer.

"Do you think the Speckled Hen could cover you all with her wings if she were to try it now?"

The Chickens looked at each other and laughed. They thought it would take three Speckled Hens to cover them.

"But she used to," said the Black Spanish Hen. She did not say anything more. She just looked at the potato-crate and at them and at the potato-crate again. Then she walked off.

After a while one of the Chickens said: "I guess perhaps there isn't room for us all there."

The mischievous one said: "If you little Chickens want to roost there you may. I am too large for that sort of thing." Then he walked up the slanting board to the apple-tree branch and perched there beside the young Shanghais. You should have seen how beautifully he did it. His toes hooked themselves around the branch as though he had always perched there, and he tucked his head under his wing with quite an air. Before long his brothers and sisters came also, and heard him saying to one of his new neighbors, "Oh, yes, I much prefer apple-trees, but when I was a Chicken I used to sleep on a potato-crate."

"Just listen to him!" whispered the Black Spanish Cock. "And he hasn't a tail-feather worth mentioning!"

"Never mind," answered the Black Spanish Hen. "Let them play that they are grown up if they want to. They will be soon enough." She sighed as she put her head under her wing and settled down for the night. It made her feel old to see her children roosting in a tree.

THE WIGGLERS BECOME MOSQUITOES

IT was a bright moonlight night when the oldest Wigglers in the rain-barrel made up their mind to leave the water. They had always been restless and discontented children, but it was not altogether their fault. How could one expect any insect with such a name to float quietly? When the Mosquito Mothers laid their long and slender eggs in the rain-barrel, they had fastened them together in boat-shaped masses, and there they had floated until the Wigglers were strong enough to break through the lower ends of the eggs into the water. It had been only a few days before they were ready to do this.

Then there had been a few more days and nights when the tiny Wigglers hung head downward in the water, and all one could see by looking across the barrel was the tips of their breathing tubes. Sometimes, if they were frightened, a young Wiggler would forget and get head uppermost for a minute, but he was always ashamed to have this happen, and made all sorts of excuses for himself when it did. Well-bred little Wigglers tried to always have their

heads down, and Mosquitoes who stopped to visit with them and give good advice told them such things as these: "The Wiggler who keeps his head up may never have wings," and, "Up with your tails and down with your eyes, if you would be mannerly, healthy, and wise."

When they were very young they kept their heads way down and breathed through a tube that ran out near the tail-end of their bodies. This tube had a cluster of tiny wing-like things on the very tip, which kept it floating on the top of the water. They had no work to do, so they just ate food which they found in the water, and wiggled, and played tag, and whenever they were at all frightened they dived to the bottom and stayed there until they were out of breath. That was never very long.

There were many things to frighten them. Sometimes a stray Horse stopped by the barrel to drink, sometimes a Robin perched on the edge for a few mouthfuls of water, and once in a while a Dragon-Fly came over to visit from the neighboring pond. It was not always the biggest visitor who scared them the worst. The Horses tried not to touch the Wigglers, while a Robin was only too glad if he happened to get one into his bill with the water. The Dragon-Flies were the worst, for they were the hungriest, and they were so much smaller that sometimes the Wigglers didn't see them coming. Sometimes, too, when they thought that a Dragon-Fly was going the other way, some of them stayed near the top of the water, only to find when it was

too late that a Dragon-Fly can go backwards or sidewise without turning around.

When they were a few days old the Wigglers began to change their skins. This they did by wiggling out of their old ones and wearing the new ones which had been growing underneath. This made them feel exceedingly important, and some of them became disgracefully vain. One Wiggler would not dive until he was sure a certain Robin had seen his new suit. It was because of that vanity he never lived to be a Mosquito.

After they had changed their skins a few times, they had two breathing-tubes apiece instead of one, and these two grew out near their heads. And their heads were much larger. At the tail-end of his body each Wiggler now had two leaf-like things with which he swam through the water. Because they used different breathing-tubes, those Wigglers who had moulted or cast their skins several times now floated in the water with their heads just below the surface and their tails down. When a Wiggler is old enough for this, he is called a Pupa, or half-grown one.

There are often young Mosquito children of all ages in the same barrel—eggs, Wigglers, and Pupæ all together. There is plenty of room and plenty of food, but because they have no work to do there is much time for quarrelling and talking about each other.

This year the Oldest Brother had put on so many airs that nobody liked it at all, and several of

the Wigglers had been heard to say that they couldn't bear the sight of him. He had such a way of saying, "When I was a young Wiggler and had to keep my head down," or repeating, "Up with your tails and down with your eyes, if you would be mannerly, healthy, and wise." One little Wiggler crossed his feelers at him, and they say that it is just as bad to do that as to make faces. Besides, it is so much easier—if you have the feelers to cross.

Now the Oldest Brother and those of his brothers and sisters who had hatched from the same egg-mass were talking of leaving the rain-barrel forever. It was a bright moonlight night and they longed to get their wings uncovered and dried, for then they would be full-grown Mosquitoes, resting most of the day and having glorious times at night.

The Oldest Brother was jerking himself through the water as fast as he could, giving his jointed body sudden bends, first this way and then that, and when he met any one nearly his own age he said, "Come with me and cast your skin. It is a fine evening for moulting."

Sometimes they answered, "All right," and jerked or wiggled or swam along with him, and sometimes a Pupa would answer, "I'm afraid I'm not old enough to slip out of my skin easily."

Then the Oldest Brother would reply, "Don't stop for that. You'll be older by the time we begin." That was true, of course, and all members of Mosquito families grow old very fast. So it happened that when the moon peeped over the farmhouse,

showing her bright face between the two chimneys, twenty-three Pupæ were floating close to each other and making ready to change their skins for the last time.

It was very exciting. All the young Wigglers hung around to see what was going on, and pushed each other aside to get the best places. The Oldest Brother was much afraid that somebody else would begin to moult before he was ready, and all the brothers were telling their sisters to be careful to split their skins in the right place down the back, and the sisters were telling them that they knew just as much about moulting as their brothers did. Every little while the Oldest Brother would say, "Now wait! Don't one of you fellows split his old skin until I say so."

Then two or three of his brothers would become impatient, because their outer skins were growing tighter every minute, and would say, "Why not?" and would grumble because they had to wait. The truth was that the Oldest Brother could not get his skin to crack, although he jerked and wiggled and took very deep breaths. And he didn't want any one else to get ahead of him. At last it did begin to open, and he had just told the others to commence moulting, when a Mosquito Mother stopped to lay a few eggs in the barrel.

"Dear me!" said she. "You are not going to moult to-night, are you?"

"Yes, we are," answered the Oldest Brother, giving a wiggle that split his skin a little farther. "We'll be biting people before morning."

"You?" said the Mosquito Mother, with a queer little smile. "I wouldn't count on doing that. But you young people may get into trouble if you moult now, for it looks like rain."

She waved her feelers upward as she spoke, and they noticed that heavy black clouds were piling up in the sky. Even as they looked the moon was hidden and the wind began to stir the branches of the trees. "It will rain," she said, "and then the water will run off the roof into this barrel, and if you have just moulted and cannot fly, you will be drowned."

"Pooh!" answered the Oldest Brother. "Guess we can take care of ourselves. I'm not afraid of a little water." Then he tried to crawl out of his old skin.

The Mosquito Mother stayed until she had laid all the eggs she wanted to, and then flew away. Not one of the Pupæ had been willing to listen to her, although some of the sisters might have done so if their brothers had not made fun of them.

At last, twenty-three soft and tired young Mosquitoes stood on their cast-off pupa-skins, waiting for their wings to harden. It is never easy work to crawl out of one's skin, and the last moulting is the hardest of all. It was then, when they could do nothing but wait, that these young Mosquitoes began to feel afraid. The night was now dark and windy, and sometimes a sudden gust blew

their floating pupa-skins toward one side of the barrel. They had to cling tightly to them, for they suddenly remembered that if they fell into the water they might drown. The oldest one found himself wishing to be a Wiggler again. "Wigglers are never drowned," thought he.

"Who are you going to bite first?" asked one of his brothers.

He answered very crossly: "I don't know and I don't care. I'm not hungry. Can't you think of anything but eating?"

"Why, what else is there to think about?" cried all the floating Mosquitoes.

"Well, there is flying," said he.

"Humph! I don't see what use flying would be except to carry us to our food," said one Mosquito Sister. She afterward found out that it was good for other reasons.

After that they didn't try to talk with their Oldest Brother. They talked with each other and tried their legs, and wished it were light enough for them to see their wings. Mosquitoes have such interesting wings, you know, thin and gauzy, and with delicate fringes around the edges and along the line of each vein. The sisters, too, were proud of the pockets under their wings, and were in a hurry to have their wings harden, so that they could flutter them and hear the beautiful singing sound made by the air striking these pockets. They knew that their brothers could never sing, and they were glad to

think that they were ahead of them for once. It was not really their fault that they felt so, for the brothers had often put on airs and laughed at them.

Then came a wonderful flash of lightning and a long roll of thunder, and the trees tossed their beautiful branches to and fro, while big rain-drops pattered down on to the roof overhead and spattered and bounded and rolled toward the edge under which the rain-barrel stood.

"Fly!" cried the Oldest Brother, raising his wings as well as he could.

"We can't. Where to?" cried the rest.

"Fly any way, anywhere!" screamed the Oldest Brother, and in some wonderful way the whole twenty-three managed to flutter and crawl and sprawl up the side of the building, where the rain-drops fell past but did not touch them. There they found older Mosquitoes waiting for the shower to stop. Even the Oldest Brother was so scared that he shook, and when he was that same Mosquito Mother who had told him to put off changing his skin, he got behind two other young Mosquitoes and kept very still. Perhaps she saw him, for it was lighter then than it had been. She did not seem to see him, but he heard her talking to her friends. "I told him," she said, "that he might better put off moulting, but he answered that he could take care of himself, and that he would be out biting people before morning."

"Did he say that?" cried the other old Mosquitoes.

"He did," she replied.

Then they all laughed and laughed and laughed again, and the young Mosquito found out why. It was because Mosquito brothers have to eat honey, and only the sisters may bite people and suck their blood. He had thought so often how he would sing around somebody until he found the nicest, juiciest spot, and then settle lightly down and bite and suck until his slender little body was fat and round and red with its stomachful of blood. And that could never be! He could never sing, and he would have to sit around with his stomach full of honey and see his eleven sisters gorged with blood and hear them singing sweetly as they flew. If Mosquito Fathers had ever come to the barrel he might have found this out, but they never did. He sneaked off by himself until he met an early bird and then—well, you know birds must eat something, and the Mosquito was right there. Of course, after that, his brothers and sisters had a chance to do as they wanted to, and the eleven sisters bit thirteen people the very next night and had the loveliest kind of Mosquito time.

THE NAUGHTY RACCOON CHILDREN

THERE was hardly a night of his life when the Little Brother of the raccoon family was not reproved by his mother for teasing. Mrs. Raccoon said she didn't know what she had done to deserve such a child. When she spoke like this to her neighbors they sighed and said, "It must be trying, but he may outgrow it."

The Oldest Wolverene, though, told the Skunk that his cousin, Mrs. Raccoon's husband, had been just as bad as that when he was young. "I do not want you to say that I said so," he whispered, "because he might hear of it and be angry, but it is true." The Oldest Wolverene didn't say whether Mr. Raccoon outgrew this bad habit, yet it would seem that his wife had never noticed it.

You must not think that Mr. Raccoon was dead. Oh, no, indeed! Every night he was prowling through the forest on tiptoe looking for food. But Mrs. Raccoon was a very devoted mother and gave so much time and attention to her children that she was not good company for her husband. He did not

care much for home life, and the children annoyed him exceedingly, so he went away and found a hole in another tree which he fitted up for himself. There he slept through the day and until the setting of the sun told him that it was time for his breakfast. Raccoons like company, and he often had friends in to sleep with him. Sometimes these friends were Raccoons like himself with wives and children, and then they would talk about their families and tell how they thought their wives were spoiling the children.

The four little Raccoons, who lived with their mother in the dead branch of the big oak-tree, had been born in April, when the forest was sweet with the scent of wild violets and every one was happy. Beautiful pink and white trilliums raised their three-cornered flowers above their threefold leaves and nodded with every passing breeze. Yellow adder's-tongue was there, with cranesbill geraniums, squirrel-corn, and spring beauties, besides hepaticas and windflowers and the dainty bishop's-cap. The young Raccoons did not see these things, for their eyes would not work well by daylight, and when, after dark, their mother let them put their heads out of the hole and look around, they were too far from the ground to see the flowers sleeping in the dusk below. They could only sniff, sniff, sniff with their sharp little turned-up noses, and wonder what flowers look like, any way.

When their mother was with them for a time, and that was while they were drinking the warm milk that she always carried for them, she told them

stories of the flowers and trees. She had begun by telling them animal stories, but she found that it made them cowardly. "Just supposing," one young Raccoon had said, "a great big, dreadful Snail should come up this tree and eat us all!"

The mother told them that Snails were small and slow and weak, and never climbed trees or ate people, but it did no good, and her children were always afraid of Snails until they had seen one for themselves. After that she told them stories of the flowers, and when they asked if the flowers would ever come to see them, she said, "No, indeed!" You will never see them until you can climb down the tree and walk among them, for they grow with their feet in the ground and never go anywhere." There were many stories which they wanted over and over again, but the one they liked best of all was that about the wicked, wicked Poison Ivy and the gentle Spotted Touch-me-not who grew near him and undid all the trouble that the Ivy made.

When the night came for the young Raccoons to climb down from their tree and learn to hunt, all the early spring blossoms were gone, and only the ripening seed-vessels showed where nodding flowers had been. You would have expected the Raccoon children to be disappointed, yet there were so many other things to see and learn about that it was not until three nights later that they thought much about the flowers. They might not have done so then if Little Sister had not lost her hold upon the oak-tree bark and fallen with her forepaws on a scarlet jack-in-the-pulpit berry.

They had to learn to climb quickly and strongly up all sorts of trees. Perhaps Mrs. Raccoon had chosen an oak for her nest because that was rough and easily climbed. There were many good places for Raccoons to grip with their twenty strong claws apiece. After they had learned oaks they took maples, ironwoods, and beeches—each a harder lesson than the one before.

"When you climb a tree," said their mother, "always look over the trunk and the largest branches for hiding-places, whether you want to use one then or not."

"Why?" asked three of the four children. Big Brother, who was rather vain, was looking at the five beautiful black rings and the beautiful black tip of his wonderful bushy tail. Between the black rings were whitish ones, and he thought such things much more interesting than holes in trees.

"Because," said the Mother Raccoon, "you may be far from home some night and want a safe place to sleep in all day. Or if a man and his Dogs are chasing you, you must climb into the first hiding-place you can. We Raccoons are too fat and slow to run away from them, and the rings on our tails and the black patches on our broad faces might show from the ground. If the hole is a small one, make it cover your head and your tail anyway, and as much of your brown body fur as you can."

Mother Raccoon looked sternly at Big Brother because he had not been listening, and he gave a slight jump and asked, "W-what did you say?"

"What did I say?" she replied. "You should have paid better attention."

"Yes'm," said Big Brother, who was now very meek.

"I shall not repeat it," said his mother, "but I will tell you not to grow vain of your fur. It is very handsome, and so is that of your sisters and your brother. So is mine, and so was your father's the last time I saw him. Yet nearly all the trouble that Raccoons have is on account of their fur. Never try to show it off."

The time came for the young Raccoons to stop drinking milk from their mother's body, and when they tried to do so she only walked away from them.

"I cannot work so hard to care for you," said she. "I am so tired and thin, now, that my skin is loose, and you must find your own food. You are getting forty fine teeth apiece, and I never saw a better lot of claws on any Raccoon family, if I do say it."

They used to go hunting together, for it is the custom for Raccoons to go in parties of from five to eight, hunt all night, and then hide somewhere until the next night. They did not always come home at sunrise, and it made a pleasant change to sleep in different trees. One day they all cuddled down in the hollow of an old maple, just below where the branches come out. Mother Raccoon had climbed the tree first and was curled away in the very bottom of the hole. The four children were not tired and

hadn't wanted to go to bed at all. Little Sister had made a dreadful face when her mother called her up the tree, and if it had not already been growing light, Mrs. Raccoon would probably have seen it and punished her.

Big Sister curled down beside her mother and Little Sister was rather above them and beside mischievous Little Brother. Last of all came Big Brother, who had stopped to scratch his ear with his hind foot. He was very proud of his little round ears, and often scratched them in this way to make sure that the fur lay straight on them. He was so slow in reaching the hole that before he got into it a Robin had begun his morning song of "Cheerily, cheerily, cheer-up!" and a Chipmunk perched on a stump to make his morning toilet.

He got all settled, and Little Brother was half asleep beside him, when he remembered his tail and sat up to have one more look at it. Little Brother growled sleepily and told him to "let his old tail alone and come to bed, as long as they couldn't hunt any more." But Big Brother thought he saw a sand-burr on his tail, and wanted to pull it out before it hurt the fur. Then he began to look at the bare, tough pads on his feet, and to notice how finely he could spread his toes. Those of his front feet he could spread especially wide. He balanced himself on the edge of the hole and held them spread out before him. It was still dark enough for him to see well. "Come here, Little Brother," he cried. "Wake up, and see how big my feet are getting."

Mother Raccoon growled at them to be good children and go to sleep, but her voice sounded dreamy and far away because she had to talk through part of her own fur and most of her daughters'.

Little Brother lost his patience, unrolled himself with a spring, jumped to the opening, and knocked his brother down. It was dreadful. Of course Big Brother was not much hurt, for he was very fat and his fur was both long and thick, but he turned over and over on his way to the ground before he alighted on his feet. He turned so fast and Little Brother's eyes hurt him so that it looked as though Big Brother had about three heads, three tails, and twelve feet. He called out as he fell, and that awakened the sisters, who began to cry, and Mother Raccoon, who was so scared that she began to scold.

Such a time! Mother Raccoon found out what had happened, and then she said, to Little Brother, "Did you mean to push him down?"

"No, ma'am," answered Little Brother, hanging his head. "Anyhow I didn't mean to after I saw him going. Perhaps I did mean to before that." You see he was a truthful Raccoon even when he was most naughty, and there is always hope for a Raccoon who will tell the truth, no matter how hard it is to do so.

Big Brother climbed slowly up the trunk of the oak-tree, while more and more of the daytime people came to look at him. He could not see well now, and so was very awkward. When he reached

KNOCKED HIS BROTHER DOWN.

the hole he was hot and cross, and complained to his mother. "Make him quit teasing me," he said, pointing one forepaw at Little Brother.

"I will," answered Mother Raccoon; "but you were just as much to blame as he, for if you had cuddled down quietly when I told you to, you would have been dreaming long ago. Now you must sleep where I was, at the lower end of the hole. Little Brother must go next, and I do not want to hear one word from either of you. Sisters next, and I will sleep by the opening. You children must remember that it is no time for talking to each other, or looking at claws, or getting sand-burrs out of your tails after you have been sent to bed. Go to sleep, and don't awaken until the sun has gone down and you are ready to be my good little Raccoons again."

Her children were asleep long before she was, and she talked softly to herself after they were dreaming. "They do not mean to be naughty," she said. "Yet it makes my fur stand on end to think what might have happened. . . . I ought not to have curled up for the day until they had done so. . . . Mothers should always be at the top of the heap." Then she fixed herself for a long, restful day's sleep.