

SCRIBNER'S MONTHLY.

Vol. V.

DECEMBER, 1872.

No. 2.

The utmost point of explanation to which my father could urge me was the statement that some time something would happen at The Mansion which would explain all. So I carefully put the "Atlantick Oshun" into its box, in which I preserved it for many months, answering all inquiries concerning it with the tantalizing statement that it was "a secret."

Toward the close of the afternoon, we came in sight of Hillsborough, with its two churches, and its cluster of embowered white houses. It was perched, like many New England villages, upon the top of the highest hill in the region, and we entered at last upon the long acclivity that led to it. Half-way up the hill, we saw before us a light open wagon drawn by two gray horses, and bearing a gentleman and lady who were quietly chatting and laughing together. As we drew near to them, they suddenly stopped, and the gentleman, handing the reins to his companion, rose upon his feet, drew a rifle to his eye and discharged it at some object in the fields. In an instant, a little dog bounced out of the wagon, and, striking rather heavily upon the ground, rolled over and over three or four times, and then, gaining his feet, went for the game. Our own horse had stopped, and, as wild as the little dog, I leaped from the chaise, and started to follow. When I came up with the dog, he was making the most extravagant plunges at a wounded woodchuck, who squatted, chattering and showing his teeth. I seized the nearest weapon in the shape of a cudgel that I could find, and dispatched the poor creature, and bore him in triumph to the gentleman, the little dog barking and snapping at the game all the way.

"Well done, my lad! I have seen boys that were afraid of woodchucks. Toss him into the ravine: he is good for nothing," said the man of the rifle.

Then he looked around, and, bowing to my father, told him that as he was fond of shooting he had undertaken to rid the farms around him of the animals that gave their owners so much trouble. "It is hard upon the woodchucks," he added, "but kind to the farmers." This was apparently said to defend himself from the suspicion of being engaged in cruel and wanton sport.

At the sound of his voice, the tired and reeking horse which my father drove whinnied, then started on, and, coming to the back of the other carriage, placed his nose close to the gentleman's shoulder. The lady looked around and smiled, while the man

placed his hand caressingly upon the animal's head. "Animals are all very fond of me," said he. "I don't understand it: I suppose they do."

There was something exceedingly winning and hearty in the gentleman's voice, and I did not wonder that all the animals liked him.

"Can you tell me," inquired my father, "where The Bird's Nest is?"

"Oh, yes, I'm going there. Indeed, I'm the old Bird himself."

"Tut! who takes care of the nest?" said the lady with a smile.

"And this is the Mother Bird—Mrs Bird," said the gentleman.

Mrs. Bird bowed to us both, and, beckoning to me, pointed to her side. It was an invitation to leave my father, and take a seat with her. The little dog, who had been helped into his master's wagon, saw me coming, and mounted into his lap, determined that he would shut that place from the intruder. I accepted the invitation, and, with the lady's arm around me, we started on.

"Now I am going to guess," said Mr. Bird. "I guess your name is Arthur Bonnicastle, that the man behind us is your father, that you are coming to The Bird's Nest to live, that you are intending to be a good boy, and that you are going to be very happy."

"You've guessed right the first time," I responded laughing.

"And I can always guess when a boy has done right and when he has done wrong," said Mr. Bird. "There's a little spot in his eye—ah, yes! you have it!—that tells the whole story," and he looked down pleasantly into my face.

At this moment one of his horses discovered a young calf by the roadside, and, throwing back his ears, gave it chase. I had never seen so funny a performance. The horse, in genuine frolic, dragged his less playful mate and the wagon through the gutter and over rocks for many rods, entirely unrestrained by his driver until the scared object of the chase slipped between two bars at the roadside, and ran wildly off into the field. At this the horse shook his head in a comical way and went quietly back into the road.

"That horse is laughing all over," said Mr. Bird. "He thinks it was an excellent joke. I presume he will think of it, and laugh again when he gets at his oats."

"Do you really think that horses laugh, Mr. Bird?" I inquired.

"Laugh? Bless you, yes," he replied.