

A ROUND TABLE FOR JUVENILE READERS

NATURE STORIES THE FAIRY HUMMING BIRD

Copyright, 1902, by Elizabeth Langsdorf

"WHAT is that?" cried the little invalid as a tiny speck of crimson and gold flashed through the open window from the garden and settled upon the roses in the crystal bowl.

His mother turned from the book she was reading. Poised above the blossoms could be seen an indistinct flutter of wings and green and gold and red plumage.

"Why, it's a fairy visitor!" she cried, running to the window, quickly closing it and drawing the lace curtains over the panes.

"A fairy!" chirped the little boy in delight. "I've always longed to see a fairy!"

"Perhaps you can coax this one to stay with us. I know just what our little fairy likes to eat. I will be back with it in a minute."

and slender tongue, sucked up the fluid with the greatest eagerness.

The sick boy admired the lovely bird to his heart's content. He praised its long, graceful wings, so marvelously adapted for sustaining the tiny body of the bird as it poised over nodding flowers. He noted the bright eyes, so keen to spy the succulent spiders, on which it often feasts.

"And what is the name of this fairy bird, for of course I know it isn't a real fairy?" the little boy asked eagerly.

"It is a ruby throated humming bird, Bertie, dear—the smallest and loveliest of all winged creatures. Its little nest is no larger than a walnut shell, and the two eggs which the mother bird lays are no larger than peas."

"Wouldn't it be nice to have a little nest outside the window? Then I could watch the birds every day," said Bertie.

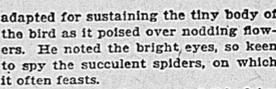
"Very nice indeed," his mother replied. "In the meantime what shall we do with our little captive?"

"If you don't mind, mamma, I prefer to set it free," Bertie ventured hesitatingly. "I'm only a little boy, but I've found it terrible to be shut up here so long. I'm sure it would be much more unpleasant for a little wild bird."

"That is like my generous boy. Then we will let our fairy go." And Bertie's mother raised the sash.

The little captive fluttered its wings. With a whirr, it was out of the room, free and joyous in the garden.

The next day the ruby throat came



IT'S A FAIRY COME TO VISIT YOU.

When she returned from the kitchen, she brought honey, sugar and water. These she mixed in a cup, putting in about two parts of refined leaf sugar, one part of honey and ten parts of water. When the nectar was prepared, she put the cup near the flowers. The



A HUMMING BIRD.

bird, perched upon the long stalks of the roses, was surveying its strange quarters in a frightened way.

No one offered to disturb it, so the little creature took courage. Perhaps the nectar appealed to its delicate sense of smell. It approached the cup and, thrusting out a wonderfully long

back with a mate. The nectar was placed upon the window sill, and both birds perched on the side of the cup and dipped their slender bills into the fluid. When they were satisfied, they began their work of nest building. They chose a rosebush near the house as the location for their home. The outside was covered with lichen, and the interior of the tiny cup was lined with soft down obtained from plants. After ten days of attention on the

part of the dainty little mother the two eggs in the nest were hatched into small birds. Bertie was by this time able to sit on the piazza. From his chair he could see the old humming birds feeding their young ones. They

gave them food which they prepared in their own crops and then forced down the infants' throats. In a week after hatching the young ones could fly, and in another week they were quite independent of their parents.

WILLIE'S SPEECH IN GNOME MAN'S LAND.

BY O. H. VON GOTTSCHALK, Author-Artist of "Yankee Doodle Gander."

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The war was now over and back from the fray Came Halberds de Hoe, who had all run away. But said they'd fight better on some future day. Their wounds were all healing and dried were their tears. And Willie, the boy who had routed their fears, Was hailed as a hero and given three cheers.



A banquet was held at the Palace, and all The Vegetables came at the King's urgent call To hear Willie speak on "The Army Worm's Fall." While Willie described how their foes had all died A Sunflower was brought to the joyful King's side. "You come from the Land of the Flowers!" he cried.

SITTING FOR A PORTRAIT

Dot and I've been photographed Heaps of times, you know, But sitting to be painted We think is rather slow.

Fancy keeping still as mice; Mustn't speak a word; Mustn't move a single inch Isn't it absurd?

You would like to look at us, We couldn't make a noise, Yet father says his 'pair of romps' Are worse than any boys.

When the picture's finished, Won't we have some fun? Please, Mr. Painter Man, Have you nearly done?

HIDDEN PROVERB FABLE.

The Fastidious Ant.

(Concealed in this fable in proper order are five words which constitute a well known proverb. Try to find them.)

An ant went down to a stream to drink and, falling into the water, was swept along by the current.

"I have scorned the wisdom of those who advised me to quench my thirst elsewhere. Ignorant beggars they may have been, but I certainly would have profited by learning a little caution from them," wailed the insect. "Now I must suffer for my folly."

No one came to the ant's rescue, although he called loudly for help.

"Alas, I shall be drowned!" he shrieked as just to his right a mud turtle rose to the surface of the water.

"Crawl on my back, friend," the good natured turtle said. "No time is to be lost."

The ant climbed on to his shell.

"Where do you wish to be landed, sir?" the turtle asked politely.

"Ants are choosers of sand hill homes," the insect replied. "Mine is farther up the stream."

"Very well," the mud turtle declared, "then swim up stream. The sand hill is too far away for me to conveniently set you down there."

And, diving under the water, he left the ant to make his way to the shore as best he could.

Solution of "The Procrastinating Butterfly."

"Strike when the iron is hot"

Countdowns.

Why is venison more costly than other meat? It is always deer.

What volumes are those which are never read? Volumes of smoke.

A LAND OF WONDERS

THE HICKORY NUT CANYON IN THE NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAINS.

NEAR TO NATURE'S HEART.

The Gap is Six Miles in Length and Girded by Mountains 2,600 Feet High—Railroad Soon to Go There—Weirdly Picturesque.

RALEIGH, N. C., June 21.—(Special.)—All of us who have "Wandered in Wonderland" have wished that dear child, but there is an easy opportunity to see a land of marvels and beauties which, even after all of Alice's experiences amid the fantastic and unreal, would delight her. Such a place is in the North Carolina mountains, and the name of it is the Hickory Nut Gap—canyon would be a better name, for it is the canyon or gorge of the Broad River, the "Rocky Broad," which has a almost a continuous cascade for miles.

This canyon, six miles in length, is 200 yards wide at its bottom and a mile wide at its top, and the mountains have their footholds to the sky at an altitude of some 2,600 feet. It is a world of stone; here displayed in the enormous frontal formations like foreheads, there veiled by the grandest of primeval forests, forests almost set on fire by waterfalls and cascades and deep pools worn in the granite and caves and labyrinths—a case in which nature shows her wonders in a highly concentrated form, a triple extract, so to speak, since in a square mile most of them are contained.

THE GRANDEST OF ALL.

One of the greatest geologists this country has ever known said that of all the mountain passes in the eastern half of the United States, the Hickory Nut Gap was the grandest and the most beautiful. The great engineers of half a century ago, who were partly dreamers and partly realists, declared it was the most easy and practicable of all the passes through the Blue Ridge, and yet to-day it is a fact that the only bit of railway which those great minds of the past planned between the South Atlantic ports and the Pacific is the little portion between Rutherfordton, N. C., and Emeryville, Tenn., traversing the Hickory Nut Gap.

At last it is about to be opened to the world by railway, but this summer many an intending tourist who is debating about the most interesting part of his trip to the mountains, and to go there before the rush which always follows a railway begins. It is strange but true that those who go there may feel almost like Alice, with the brightness of New England towns, set here and there amidst them; the grape and peach country, the miles of long leaf pine, the granite and the brownstone regions, and everywhere the hum of the factories for on the Seaboard Air-Line, and between Weldon and Rutherfordton, there are no fewer than fifty-five cotton mills. An interesting view is afforded of the fine macadamized roads of Mecklenburg county, the best in all the south, and this is in the mountain foothills, and is a sight to be seen in a level strata, all being either up or down hill. With a cheery heart the traveler sets out for Hickory Nut Gap, in an attractive vehicle and behind a spanking steed, cleverly driven. All along the road there are people at the mountains and at

most picturesque farmhouses, not a few of the latter a century old, with prosperous farmers standing amid their grain fields, the ever-present fruit trees, or in their flower-bedded yards, for nowhere is there greater love of flowers than in these primitive mountain homes, while the flowers are the finest of their kind. The road grows wilder and presently runs alongside the rocky Broad River, which it crosses twice. The most beautiful of mountain flowers, the rhododendron, appears in white, pink and blue, becoming presently so profuse as to wall in the river with its greenness and make gay the gloom with all its bravery of blossom.

As the end of the journey is neared, a turn of the road brings into view vast masses of mountains, swelling right and left, on each side, like the wide-shouldered horns of a bull, and between these horns lies the objective point, Hickory Nut canyon. The road makes a little climb and the river begins to roar, a sound which never ceases in the gap.

ESMERALDA INN.

The road swings past Logan's, an old, old place, at which Mrs. Burnett, the novelist, wrote "Esmeralda," so cleverly dramatized and so popular as a play, and hard by, on the side of a vast cliff of stone, is a formation, one of nature's freaks, given the name of "Esmeralda's Cabin." Fast Flack's, another tourist resort, the road goes and the great mountains rise on each side at a sharper angle, until they seem to wall in the world, and finally the horses are pulled up in front of the "coziest corner in the mountains," the "Esmeralda Inn." Mine host Thomas Turner appears with kindly welcome, and he has lived there ten years, but so

beautiful and yet so grand is the environment that for him it has always been the fascination of a first impression. The "Esmeralda Inn" is itself a part of the scene and harmonizes with the picturesque surroundings in which it is set, with its back to one mountain wall and its front facing the other mighty wall of the canyon.

No nobler view or one which lingers longer on the memory can be found in all the mountains. In front the mountain rests at so high an angle that it literally towers.

A VAST PRECIPICE.

To the left it ends in "Chimney Rock," an enormous projection, three hundred feet high, which leans almost against the side of the mountain. There is a thousand feet of nearly sheer precipice, with only one break in its continuity, where in past ages a strip of the strata of stone has formed a projection, sometimes a few yards in length, sometimes but a foot, here and there with trees or shrub. This leads along midway of that frightful wall, and is called the "Applan Way." There is a sharp climb to "Chimney Rock," and a noble view from its top, and ascending to its base, the level of the "Applan Way," one traverses the latter with the precipice above and below, with views of the canyon, the river and the lofty mountain wall opposite. The "Applan Way" ends at the top of the Hickory Nut fall, the third in this country in point of height. The fall is at first a cascade, but in a few yards begins its great leap from jagged masses of stone 500 feet below, where there are mist clouds and rainbows, the latter often one above

another to the number of half a dozen or more.

These vast precipices of stone are literally "pictured rocks." Under one portion of the "Applan Way" is the "Phantom Bridge." A mass of stone has fallen out, showing a clear line of cleavage, and forming a shallow-arched bridge with one side apparently lying against the precipice. Under this great arch nature, using her pigments, has fixed two pictures, as if in panels, one of these representing a scene on the ocean shore, with a lighthouse in the foreground, the other a city view. These pictures require no straining of imagination, but are clear and bold, as is also a face in the rock, a vast visage, clear always.

A FIERCE WATER-FALL.

Directly in front of the "Esmeralda Inn" is a water-fall with a height of 138 feet, and above and below this over a thousand feet of cascades. At the foot of this fall were seen the bones of a wild-cat killed by going over it, and in a pool near its foot was a raccoon, which had made the plunge and escaped death, but was sorely battered and helpless when rescued. This water-fall is a superb shower-bath of nature's own providing. There is on this same mountain wall another of the enormous scared cliffs, this one known as the "Blue Rock," but there is no "Applan Way" along its face, which is of remarkably smooth granite 1,500 feet high and 1,600 yards in length. To its summit there is a trail, part of the 40 miles of trail in the Gap, and the view is grand indeed, even finer than that from Chimney Rock, extended 60 miles to the right down the vista of the Gap, and to the left over three mountain passes with

scores of peaks near or far.

There is another natural curiosity, the caves, on this same mountain face. Crossing the river over a swinging bridge made of four vines and chestnut planks, the trail is picked up and its ascent quickly becomes steep. The vast rocks show themselves almost at once, and for a thousand feet the ascent is practically over rocks, under rocks and through rocks, amid a maze of caves, caverns, passages and precipices as wild as Dante's "Inferno," or in the wildest Pyrenees. It is warm work, this climb, and when a sheer wall of rock is reached one pauses to rest.

DEATH-LIKE WINDS.

There is a perpendicular cleft in this wall perhaps a foot in width, and from it pours a torrent of air which has a death-like chill, and in which one cannot stand a minute. It is as if this mountain of caves is breathing. This is the "Cave of the Winds," winds which never cease, which come from a great distance and are chilled by the caverns. There is more climbing. A corner is sharply turned, and the wind from "Little Bat" whirs at the lover's neck the opening is a descent. The cave is an inverted "U" like all the others. None are domed or arched, all are clearly formed by pressure. At its top there are openings like streaks of light, and vast stones hang there, too large to pass through, but yet frightening. It is the same case in "Little Bat" cave, near its opening. Both caves are only partially explored, but there are abysses which terrify.

Across one part of Bat cave is a natural bridge, and a further descent. On the sides of the mountains are many of the house-like pictures, due to the wearing away or weathering of the softer parts of the stone and the shading and coloring of the remainder by the natural pigments on the rocks. Some of these are much more real than "Esmeralda's Cabin," and, in fact, it is difficult to distinguish the real from the unreal, for there are real houses on the summits of some of these frightful cliffs.

"The rose of light" is as picturesque a hamlet as the mountains shelter, with its stone-walled river, its church on a cliff, its one street and three roads leading to mountain passes.

FREAKS OF BALD MOUNTAIN.

Across the gorge, on the Esmeralda side, are the "Thousand Cascades," a half-mile of tumbling stream, also some quite high water-falls, and a trail leads to the much-talked-about "Bald Mountain," which is a quarter of a century ago exhibited as an asserted, some of the features of a volcano, that is smoke and noise. It is even yet claimed that these mountain groanings were heard as far away as Rutherfordton. Quite lately the volcanic disposition of the mountain has been asserted, and people report smoke, sulphurous fumes, etc. As we looked out over the wide slope and towering cone of the "Bald," there was no sign of smoke, but smoke that filled the air from three other points. One might safely wager that each of these smokes was the outward and visible sign of the presence of an illicit distillery, making the beverage known as corn whiskey—only this and nothing more. There is no limestone in these mountains, and scientists have declared that the smoke, if there was any, which rose from "Old Bald," might be due to the decomposition of shale. The rumbling, as there were any, might be due to the fall of rock masses into the caverns, which are found there, for they are as numerous as in "Bat Cave Mountain." Some of the residents even claim that new caves have lately developed, and that older ones have become larger, but vivid imaginations play a large part in all such matters. Scientists have thoroughly explored "Old Bald," and find him as quiet as any of his neighbors. Instead of being due to the decomposition of shale, the Western North Carolina volcanoes are due to the decomposition of corn. They will never drive people from the mountains, but have quite the reverse effect.

PRIMEVAL FOREST.

The forests are so set on end that the trees are spread out like a panorama. There is a fortnight of difference in growth between the river level and the mountain top, both immediately in view. At the base of the mountain the trees are in full bloom; at the summit there is not a blossom. This primeval forest is made up of scores of different trees, the most prominent being the chestnut, poplar, oak, of several

kinds, hickory, hemlock, spruce, walnut, yellow locust, sourwood, tamarack, rhododendron, white pine, beach, birch, bellwood, etc. Beside one of the trails is a poplar 21 feet in circumference and 125 feet in height. Many chestnuts are of enormous size. The old trail of the Cherokee Indians is on the side of one of these mountain walls, about 200 yards above the river, and is yet used.

In this canyon, screened by 2,900 feet of mountain, from the cold north wind, all sorts of trees, plants, fruits, flowers and vegetables flourish. Here in the grounds of the Esmeralda Inn, in queer juxtaposition, are the native trees above referred to, and amid them and quite at home the magnolia in bloom and the fig in full bearing. The Esmeralda estate covers four square miles, embracing all the finest scenery, extending from the crest of the mountain on one side to the other crest across the gorge. This land is literally "an end," and the owner can stand in the bottom of the vast "U" and see it all.

The railway which will open this mountain paradise to the world will have very fine gradients, only 37 feet to the mile, as against 300 in the Swannanoa Gap route, and 225 in the Saluda Gap route.

FRED A. OLDS.

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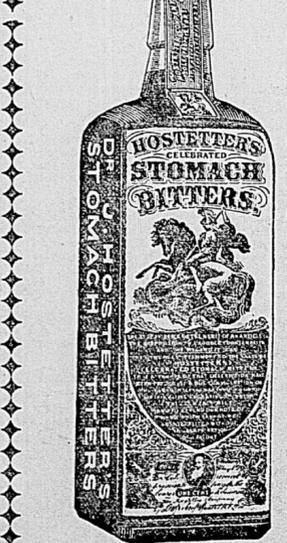
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