

**ELIZA  
BRIGHTWEN**

INMATES OF  
MY HOUSE  
AND GARDEN

Eliza Brightwen

**Inmates of my House and Garden**

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# Mrs. Brightwen

## Inmates of my House and Garden

Dear Miss Ormerod, —

For thirty years you have been a pioneer in the fields of agricultural zoology and chemistry, and it may most truly be said that no woman has ever done so much as you have to protect agriculture against its natural enemies. In the special departments to which you have devoted your life, it is universally admitted that you are without a rival.

My little volumes do not compete with work so serious as yours, yet you have gratified me with your commendation of their truthfulness, and you have permitted me the pleasure of dedicating to you this one, in some chapters of which I deal with the classes which are most familiar to yourself.

*Believe me to be  
Yours very sincerely,  
ELIZA BRIGHTWEN.  
The Grove, Great Stanmore.  
June, 1895.*

### PREFACE

ENCOURAGED by the extremely kind reception which has been awarded to my previous books, and by the assurances, which have reached me from the most unexpected sources, that they have been found pleasant and profitable, I am venturing to offer to the same indulgent public a third collection of personal studies of natural history.

I recognise clearly that my little volumes have been received with so much favour, because, in spite of their simplicity and their lack of scientific importance, they are, so far as they go, original. That is to say, I have not much to give, but what I have is of my own gathering. I have not borrowed from other and cleverer writers, but have set down as plainly as I could what I have myself observed and experienced.

It is my privilege to be unusually well placed for the minute study of living creatures, and in that study I find a pleasure so intense that I long to attract others to the same well-spring of pleasure. Unpretending as are the chronicles of the inmates of my house and garden, they are scrupulously true, and every fact that a veracious observer records is a contribution, however small, to our general sum of knowledge.

It only remains to say that a few of these chapters have appeared in *Nature Notes* and in *The Girl's Own Paper*. The rest are now printed for the first time.

*ELIZA BRIGHTWEN.*

## LEMURS

“In consecrated earth  
And on the holy hearth  
The Lars and Lemurs moan with midnight plaint.”

*Milton.*

AMONGST the many curious animals I had kept and studied, there had never, so far, been a specimen of the monkey tribe. I had always feared that I could not meet their requirements in the way of food and temperature, and that a proper place for such creatures did not exist at the Grove.

However, the offer of a pair of lemurs tempted me into many consultations and much searching amongst the books in the library, in order to find out all that could be learned about the nature of these animals, until I found myself speculating as to whether it would not, after all, be possible to make them happy.

Lemurs are inhabitants of the island of Madagascar, where they live in the woods, feeding on fruits. All accounts agree in describing them as quiet, gentle creatures, very agile in their movements and nocturnal in their habits.

The word *lemur* was employed by the ancients to describe the unbodied spirits of men, whether beneficent or malignant; the festivals called *lemuria* were appointed for the appeasing and “laying” of ghosts. The animals received their name from their almost noiseless movements; they must, I suppose, look very ghastly and uncanny as they flit about on the tree-branches at night.

The more I read about them the more it appeared to me that I must not lightly pass by such an opportunity of obtaining rare subjects for naturalistic study. So the lemurs were accepted, and I sent a man to the other side of London to bring them, cage and all, with great care to their new home.

Until I knew their size and something about their requirements I could not very well prepare a place for them, and I reckoned on their living in the cage that they came in for a few days at least after their arrival. What, then, was my dismay when the lemurs arrived to find that they were packed in a small hamper, and that no cage had come with them, as it had been found too large to be conveyed by any cab or other sort of carriage.

Plainly the poor animals could not stay in the hamper, and I had nothing large enough to hold them. They were so timid that I was afraid to let them loose in the conservatory; they might have sprung up to the roof and remained there, where it would be cold, and as I had been very specially warned to guard them against draughts, I was puzzled indeed to know what to do with them. At last a large circular linen-basket was found, which made a temporary home until we could think of some better place in which to keep them.

When the hamper was opened the poor frightened creatures were seen, locked in each other's arms, gazing at us with round glassy eyes. It was some days before we could really see what beautiful animals they were, since their timidity was so great that, though they would eat bananas out of my hand gently enough, nothing would induce them to come out of their hiding-place and be friendly.

As soon as possible, a bay at one end of the conservatory was wired in, some tree-branches were fixed for the lemurs to climb upon, and a large plant-case, with glass sides and top, and soft hay within, made a cosy retreat when they wished for complete retirement.

It was very enjoyable to let the new pets into their pleasant home. They instantly and fully approved of it, climbing at once to the highest branch, and gazing down at us with a far happier expression in their great eyes than they had hitherto shown. And now for the first time we could appreciate the beauty of their silky-white fur and wonderful tails.

I found out that these were specimens of the Ruffed Lemur, the most beautiful of the ten species found in Madagascar. I will try and describe them, though it will not be easy to give a very clear idea of creatures which vary so much in aspect according to the position they adopt.

Sitting on the top of their glass house, side by side, with their long furry tails coiled around them, they looked like two huge Persian cats, but standing or climbing they showed themselves to be true monkeys, although far exceeding the ordinary monkey in gracefulness.

Round the head was a full ruff of long white hairs, setting off the gentle, fox-like face, which was mostly black, as were the small, well-shaped hands and feet. Lemurs have four fingers and a thumb on the hands, and the great toe and four smaller ones, as well as the fingers, have perfect nails, which makes the creatures look very human.

The thick woolly fur was white, with large patches of black, and the tail, three-quarters of a yard in length, was precisely like a lady's black fur boa, and was used much in the same way, either laid gracefully across the back or over the feet, or wherever else warmth might be required.

When I offered food to these lemurs they had a curious way of obtaining it when not quite within their reach. The little black hand was stretched out and took a firm but very gentle grasp of my fingers, drawing them nearer until the coveted fruit could be reached, and even if the banana could have been taken direct they preferred to hold my hand, and did it so prettily that I was tempted always to make them reach out for it.

Considering the ghost-like character associated with these animals, we thought that "Spectre" and "Phantom" would be appropriate names; they do not, however, respond to any endearing epithets, and only manifest emotion when a banana is offered for their acceptance.

I fancy they are somewhat unintelligent; they differ greatly from the ordinary type of monkey, in that they sit still by the hour together, and have no idea of mischief or of helping themselves in any way; for instance, a monkey, if feeling cold, will accept a shawl and wrap it round him, finding the comfort of it; but these creatures would sit and shiver and die of cold before the idea of covering themselves would enter their dull brains.

They are masters of the art of expressing surprise and contempt. If something is offered to them that they do not like, they bridle up and turn away their heads as much as to say, "Dear me, no! nothing earthly would induce me to touch a thing like that; remove it at once!"

My greatest surprise in connection with the lemurs took place about two months after their arrival. I had carried Mungo<sup>1</sup> to see them, and carefully holding him by his string, I allowed him to stand and gaze up at them through the wires.

He had often done this before, and beyond a few angry snorts and their usual grunting sounds they had taken no notice, but on this occasion they both at the same moment set up the most terrific roar that I ever heard. I do not exaggerate when I declare that it really seemed as loud as the roar of a lion at the Zoo. I was close to them, and it was so utterly unexpected I don't think I was ever quite so astonished in all my life. The sound was truly awful, and it lasted for half a minute or more, till I felt completely stunned, and was glad enough to retreat to a quiet room where my nerves could recover from the shock.

I think the Madagascar woods where these animals dwell must be most gruesome places at night, with these black and white creatures flitting about in the branches, abruptly uttering their terrific roars at intervals.

A family quarrel among lemurs must be a thing to remember. Besides this, they also give a loud groan now and then, which irresistibly reminds one of *Punch's* "moaning gipsy in the back garden." Such a groan must sound additionally weird at night in the dark woods.

When I gave my friends an account of the scare I had had, one of them returned with me to the conservatory to be favoured with a special performance of "Ghosts." Mungo was brought in once

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<sup>1</sup> My pet mongoose.

more, and up rose the awful sound, with such effect that my friend turned and fled, even though she had been forewarned. Fear is quite irresistibly awakened by the strange quality of the sound given forth by these animals. Having very slight means of defending themselves, I imagine this roaring power has been bestowed upon them to enable them to scare their foes, and drive away through fear such enemies as their soft hands could never overcome in fair fight.

After keeping these lemurs about a year, I found that by no amount of kindness or coaxing could I get them to be really friendly, and I feared they were not over-happy without companions of their own kind. They were doubtless caught too old to be tamed. It was therefore deemed best to present them to the Zoo, where, under the kind and skilful treatment they receive, they are, I believe, in splendid health and spirits.

Visitors to the monkey-house can identify them from the description I have here given, and cannot fail to admire the agile movements and furry beauty of my quondam pets.

## TOMMY AND PEARLIE

“So abundant, indeed, are lemurs in Madagascar, that, according to M. Grandidier, who has done so much to increase our knowledge of this group, at least one individual is almost sure to be found in every little copse throughout the island.”

ALTHOUGH I was unsuccessful in taming my handsome ruffed lemurs, Spectre and Phantom, I felt that lemurs were delightful animals to keep as pets, and I resolved that if an opportunity offered for obtaining other and more tameable specimens of the same kind I would certainly try again, and with my past experience I hoped to attain good results.

One day I heard that a young specimen of a Ruffed Lemur had been seen in a cage at the top of a cart full of birds and curious animals, a sort of small travelling menagerie which was stopping for a few days at a town five miles off. A mounted messenger was sent off at once with a basket, and full directions about the purchase of the little lemur, and, to my great delight, when the man returned with it, it proved to be all I could desire, quite young and healthy and very tame.

It must have been a pleasant change from the cold, draughty cage it had been used to, to the large wired-in recess in my conservatory, which was always kept at a genial temperature, and where, leaping from branch to branch, the agile little creature could play its graceful frolics from morning till night, hanging head downwards, swinging on a trapeze like a born acrobat, and evidently enjoying its life as much as if it had been in its native woods. The showman had always called the lemur Tommy, so we supposed that was an indication of its sex, and retained the name to which it had been accustomed.

One day in summer I had one of my large parties of poor people in the garden, and Tommy was led about with a long string, greatly to the delight of my visitors. The lemur was in no way frightened by the crowd; he made friends with everybody, and hopped about from one group to another quite at his ease. After a time a harp and violin began to sound, and then Tommy’s love of music became apparent, for he seated himself close to the players, and there he remained quite riveted by the unusual sounds, gazing intently at the harpist as if spellbound.

They were but village musicians, and I was not a little surprised when, on my remarking how music was appreciated by the lemur, one of the men remarked, “It keeps reminding me of King Robert of Sicily and his 'solemn ape.’” One hardly expected such a knowledge of Longfellow’s poetry in a country rustic!

It is not the first time I have been scared by the display of unlooked-for intelligence, as the following anecdote will show.

Many years ago I was talking to my cook on culinary matters in the dining-room, when she suddenly looked up at a majolica plate over the doorway, and said, “That’s a mythological subject isn’t it, ma’am?” I replied that it was. She then said, “Is that Pan in the foreground?” I said, “No, but it is a Satyr.” “Well,” replied Cookie, “I was saying the other day to the butler, if there were creatures of that sort to be seen nowadays it would go far to prove the Darwinian theory – wouldn’t it, ma’am?” History does not record my reply! I gazed at the creature depicted on the plate, half man and half animal, and felt there was much acumen in my learned servant’s remark, but, the question of that day’s dinner being once settled, I thought it best to leave the Darwinian theory alone, lest I might not prove equal to the occasion.

This, however, is a digression. I have now to record the advent of Tommy’s companion, Pearlle. It seemed well that the lemur should have a playmate, and I often endeavoured to provide one, but was unsuccessful, until one day, on visiting the Bedford Conservatories in Covent Garden, I saw some pretty grey creature curled up in a cage, and on inquiry I found that it was a specimen of another species, the Ring-Tailed Lemur, quite young and very tame. It was just what I wanted, so the little animal was carefully packed in a hamper, and I brought it home with me.

I feared to place this little lemur at once with Tommy, lest they might not agree, so, for the night, the new pet was placed in a large basket, and covered with a railway rug. Next morning it was discovered on the top of the highest picture frame, having forced its way out of the basket. A banana soon tempted it to come down, and in the most friendly manner it sat upon my shoulder and seemed delighted to be caressed and played with. Before long, when the two lemurs had become accustomed to each other, they were allowed to meet, and quickly became the greatest friends, playing together for hours and affording us constant amusement in watching their graceful gambols.

These lemurs are always giving me surprises. I was quite unprepared for the remarkable power the ring-tailed lemur possesses of running swiftly up the flat surface of a door, but this Pearlie did with the greatest ease, and then sat calmly looking down at me from the top as if enjoying my amazement. I was led to examine his paws, and found they were provided with elastic pads somewhat like a fly's foot with its suckers, and then reading about this particular species I learned that it inhabits a rocky tableland without trees, so that it is not arboreal in its habits, but is formed with leather-like palms to its hands to enable it to keep a firm footing on wet and slippery rocks, where it is not possible for human beings, although barefooted, to follow it. When he is brought into a sitting-room it is very needful to have a leading-string attached to Pearlie's waistband, else he darts away and is at the top of a picture frame out of reach in a moment. His agility is only second to that of the Gibbon – the wonderful spider-like monkey one may sometimes see at the Zoological Gardens performing marvels of agility in swinging, by means of his attenuated arms and legs.

During the summer months my lemurs much enjoy being in the open air, and on fine days they are tethered on the lawn, where they amuse my visitors with their graceful frolics. The entire absence of odour, their cleanly habits, and their delicate tastes as to diet render these animals especially desirable as pets; they enjoy fruit of all kinds – lettuces, clover-blossoms, and rose-petals, while dates, raisins, and bread and milk supply solid items of food. Thus fed and warmly housed these creatures can be kept in splendid health with very little trouble.

Pearlie was so named from his fur being of a soft pearl-grey colour, the long tail being banded with alternate rings of black and white. His face and chest are also curiously marked in black and white, the eyes bright orange, and the general expression is as gentle as that of a little cat.

We found out in the course of time that Tommy was of the gentler sex! Her name must therefore be considered the diminutive for Thomasina – at least I see no other way out of the difficulty, as a new name would not be responded to or understood.

Pearlie's portrait requires a word of explanation. His great delight in cold weather is to be allowed to sit on a hassock before the drawing-room fire and bask in its warmth. The instant he is seated before the cheerful blaze, up go his little arms in a worshipping attitude like a veritable Parsee. Thus he will remain for hours content and happy as long as I am in the room, but if left alone he makes a pitiful cry and starts off in search of some of his friends, as though life were not endurable without human companionship. I think this is always the case where animals are treated with uniform kindness; they must be able to trust those who feed and care for them, and when that perfect trust is established they yield a love that is often quite touching in its intensity. These two lemurs are very different in character. Tommy is absolutely selfish and strongly self-willed, timid and cautious. Pearlie shines by contrast, and is ready to give up, gentle, affectionate, and confiding. It is true they are of different species, and that may in a measure account for the differing characters they exhibit, but seeing they were both obtained when quite young, and treated alike with unvarying kindness, one would have thought that original tendencies would have become more thoroughly effaced. Allowing for Tommy's moral failings, one must own that he and Pearlie are delightful specimens of the monkey tribe. They keep their lovely fur spotlessly clean, are quite inodorous, always ready to be caressed, and add greatly to the interest of my conservatory by their lively movements and graceful antics.

## MUNGO

MUNGO, the Ichneumon, whose early life was chronicled in “More about Wild Nature,” has now been a household pet for nearly four years, and must be nearly six years old.

I do not know how long these animals generally live, but as yet Mungo shows no signs of age or infirmity. He is as full of fun and as inquisitive as ever, but not so bent upon mischief as in his youthful days. He now has the range of house and garden, and goes wherever he likes without even a collar to remind him of captivity.

The chief trouble is in connection with my visitors – those at least who have a strong objection to “wild animals about the house”; nothing, however, can possibly be less “wild” than Mungo, for he is just like a tame cat. He does not dream of biting or scratching, and is never so happy as when curled up in the lap of some indulgent friend; yet, as he unfortunately looks like a ferret, many people find it very hard to believe that he can be perfectly harmless.

Mungo delights to spend his mornings basking in the sun on the window-sill of my bedroom, where he is sufficiently elevated to watch all that goes on in the garden. He is scarcely ever asleep; as Mr. Rudyard Kipling says so truly, in the delightful account he gives of an Indian Mongoose in the *Jungle Book*, “He is eaten up from nose to tail with curiosity,” and whilst seeming to slumber, the active little cinnamon-coloured nose is ever on the work sniffing out the varied movements of the household.

As summer comes on we naturally let the fire die out; and Mungo strongly disapproves of this custom, for he dearly loves to bask on a little wool mat before a hot fire. Now, however, he adopts another plan – when he finds the fire is out he quietly climbs over the wire-guard, goes under the grate and there lies down amongst the warm ashes. He has even done this whilst there remained some fire in the grate, and I much fear he may make an *auto-da-fe* of himself some day by setting his long hair alight, which would be a terrible fate indeed for our cherished pet.

Mungo’s love of warmth leads to another undesirable habit. He will steal into the bedrooms and hide himself under the duvets, and – low be it spoken! – he has been found cosily rolled up in a nightdress!

It may naturally be asked, “Why is he not kept in a suitable wired-in place where he can do no harm?” Simply because he makes himself perfectly miserable in confinement; he tears at the wirework till his paws are bleeding, and foams at the mouth with misery and rage. No one could keep an amiable little animal in such purgatory; it would be kinder to end its life at once, and such a fate cannot even be thought of.

Mungo is a diplomatist! Liberty he has schemed to obtain, and after years of astute planning, and almost reasoning, he has reached his end, and we must acknowledge ourselves beaten, for to all intents and purposes he is now master of the situation and may do pretty much what he pleases.

There is, however, still a crumpled roseleaf in his lot; the softest bed and the sunniest nook to bask in will not satisfy Mungo without human society, and as we cannot give up all other occupations in order to sit with him, he is often to be seen wandering about like an unquiet spirit until he finds some friendly lap where he can curl himself up and enjoy all those conditions of warmth, ease, and society which form his idea of perfect bliss.

I am sure Mungo is a staunch Conservative as to his political views! He hates changes of any kind, since they interfere with his personal comfort and methodical habits. He likes to have a morning sleep in a sunny spot, and then his profound interest in a certain rhododendron bed, where rabbit-holes and mole-tracks are to be found, leads him to steal across the lawn and disappear amongst the bushes. I rather fancy he has grand times there, for if I attempt to coax him to come with me, his pert little nose will appear amidst the leaves, and with a frisk and a leap of absolute disobedience and fun he will return to his playground and remain there till it pleases him to come indoors again.

His next desire is to enjoy a quiet afternoon under a warm duvet, and as he behaves with absolute propriety and only covets warmth and quietness, I am indulgent enough to allow him the luxury of being in my room until evening, when he is fed, wrapped up in a wool mat and a piece of baize and placed safely in his cage for the night.

Although Mungo would often absent himself for hours at a time, we were so sure to see him trotting quietly home when his frolics were ended, that somehow the possibility of an accident happening to him never crossed our minds. When, however, one day he did not return by evening, and night came on and no one had seen or heard anything of my pet, I felt certain he had met with some sad fate – most probably had been caught in a snare or trap set by the poachers on the common. Next day, gardeners and farm-men were sent out in all directions to look for him. The search went on for many hours, and at last I heard the welcome cry, “Mungo is found!” Poor little fellow! but how my heart ached to see him in torturing pain with a wild, scared look in his eyes. He had, as we suspected, strayed across the boundary on to the common, and there he had been caught in a spring-trap, which had completely crushed one of his fore-paws.

I had only a few minutes in which to decide whether the poor little animal must be put out of his misery at once or if there might be hope, by skilful amputation, of ultimate recovery. I am sure that all lovers of animals will understand the keen distress I felt at having to make such a decision, but something must be done, and as I found I *could not* give the death warrant, Mungo was taken to the veterinary doctor, with injunctions to spare no pains in trying to save the patient all needless suffering. Two surgeons attended to the case, and whilst under chloroform the little animal was relieved of the injured paw, and must have been remarkably well treated, for I was soon informed that Mungo was doing well and would take some “bird” for his dinner! In about a fortnight he was brought home and looked very pitiful, limping about on three legs. It was long before I could become accustomed to see him thus, but so well did the wound heal that now the limp can hardly be observed, and the little creature is as merry as ever, scampering about and playing with his own tail as lively as any kitten.

It has been an interest to me to make a study of the character of my mongoose, for a wild creature rendered perfectly tame by unvarying kind treatment gives one an excellent opportunity of observing the real nature of the animal.

I fear I must own that Mungo is absolutely selfish, his one idea is to enjoy perfect liberty and have his own way in everything. After four years’ petting he knows me well as his friend and purveyor, but he has not an atom of affection; he has, apparently, no mode of manifesting regard, the expression of his face never alters, he does not try to lick my hand or make any greeting sound. He likes to jump into my lap simply because it is a comfortable place, and, as he is very timid at any unwonted noise, he will run to me for protection, but I am afraid he views me as a means of attaining physical comfort, food, and warmth, and nothing more!

All this does not prevent my liking the curious little animal, but one cannot but be struck by the immense difference between its nature and that of the faithful dog, whose devotion to his master will lead him to refuse his food, to take long, toilsome journeys, to wait patiently for weary hours in cold wind and biting frost when bidden to guard his owner’s flock, aye, and even to yield up his life, if necessary, to do his master service.

All this shows, what I have often remarked before, that, to those who are observant of the fact, there is as much difference between the characters of various animals, and even between those of individuals of the same species, as may be found in human beings.

Possibly Mungo may be a selfish specimen of his race, and there may exist brilliant exceptions abounding in affection and other noble qualities. I can only describe him as he is, and, judging by his small cranium and its peculiarly flattened formation, I should imagine he is formed to be, not a pattern of all the virtues, but a creature of one idea, and that – snake-killing! To be proficient in that art all the characteristics I have noted in this animal are specially needed, such as lynx-like

watchfulness, undaunted courage in fight, persistent curiosity and determination to care for himself under all circumstances.

We must therefore wink at his failure in moral goodness, and admire the way in which he carries out the purpose for which he was made. He worthily adorns his own special niche in Creation.

## SQUIRRELS WON BY KINDNESS

“Drawn from his refuge in some lonely elm,  
That age or injury has hollowed deep,  
Where, on his bed of wool and matted leaves,  
He has outslept the winter, ventures forth  
To frisk a while, and bask in the warm sun,  
The squirrel, flippant, pert, and full of play:  
He sees me, and at once, swift as a bird,  
Ascends the neighbouring beech; there whisks his brush,  
And perks his ears, and stamps and scolds aloud.”

*Cowper.*

ABOUT ten years ago we began taming the wild squirrels which exist in great numbers in the woods around this house. We put Barcelona nuts in a small basket outside the dining-room window, and every day a handful thrown on the ground served to attract the notice of the little animals. In a very short time the squirrels ventured to approach, timidly at first, picking up their favourite food; they would scratch up the nuts and rush away to some quiet spot out of sight.

Generations of the graceful little rodents have been trained to come nearer and nearer to the window, until they are now so delightfully tame that I feel induced to suggest to others the means of enjoying the pleasure we find in watching our daily visitors from the woods.

My first act before breakfast is to place a handful of nuts on a small table which stands in the room close to a bay window. Hardly have I done so when in come the squirrels, sliding up to the window and leaping on to the table to enjoy the nuts. They will take nuts gently from our hands, and sitting up in the graceful position a squirrel adopts when quite at ease – its tail curved over its back, and its tiny paws holding the nut – they crack them and fling away the shells in careless fashion. A scrimmage sometimes takes place when several come in together; one bolder spirit will chase another round the room until both spring out at the window and dart across the lawn. At length the nuts on the table being eaten or carried away, the squirrels, well knowing where the supply is kept, descend to the floor and hop leisurely to a cupboard, where on the first shelf is a box full of Barcelonas. The little animals spring on to the shelf and help themselves. This they are allowed to do for a little while, as we like to watch their proceedings; but I make a protest presently, and close the cupboard door when I find my entire stock of nuts being transferred to the garden and planted all over the lawn, for the squirrels bury nuts for future use, although I am very doubtful whether they do really dig them up again.

On cold mornings when the windows cannot be opened, it is touching to see the little furry heads peep through the pane, waiting patiently for their daily meal. This they eventually share with several very tame nuthatches; these birds seeming very glad of nuts as well as fat during the winter months.

The only drawback to having wild squirrels tamed is the distraction they cause when a class of village children is being taught in the dining-room! Sydney Smith says: “A sparrow fluttering about the church is an antagonist which the most profound theologian in Europe is wholly unable to overcome,” and certainly the apparition of a bright-eyed squirrel popping up at each window in succession is enough to drive a teacher to despair. Nothing less than an abundant shower of nuts will bribe the little intruders to keep quiet for a time.

I have given these simple details because I think that possibly many of my readers may like to encourage those charming little animals when they learn how easily, by a little patient kindness, they may be attracted from the woods to become household pets of their own free will, which is, to my mind, so much more enjoyable than keeping captive animals or birds. It should, perhaps, be added

that great quietness and calm are needed while the first advances are being made, and that a loud voice or a quick gesture will undo a week's work in taming.

## A “FAIRY” STORY

“I joyed to hear her own peculiar note  
Through all the music float;  
But when the gentle song, that streamed away,  
Like some enamoured rivulet that flows  
Under a night of leaves and flowering may,  
Died on the stress of its own lovely pain,  
Even as it died away,  
It seemed as if no influence could restrain  
The notes from welling in the whitethroat’s brain.”

*Edmund Gosse.*

I AM often envied as the possessor of one of the most charming bird-pets it is possible to imagine.

“Fairy” is a tiny whitethroat, a sleek, delicate, grey-coloured bird with a white breast, lovely in form, swift in flight, and of most engaging disposition.

I met with it in this wise. A plaintive little cheeping sound attracted my attention one morning at breakfast-time, and looking outside the window, I saw a tiny, half-fledged bird sitting on the ground, looking pitifully up at me; it pleaded its hungry condition with open beak, and seemed to have no fear at my approach. Of course such a poor little motherless waif must be cared for, so I brought it in, and it received very readily the provender I offered it.

I never saw such a tiny, quaint-looking piece of bird-life. Its little throat-feathers were beginning to show on either side like a small white cravat; it had about half an inch of tail, and minute quills all over its body gave token of coming feathers. The delightful thing about it was its exceeding tameness; it would sit on my finger and gaze at me with a contemplative expression; no noise frightened it; it was quite content with life in a basket, or on the table, and therefore it became my constant companion, and has grown to be very dear to me and to a wide circle of friends.

Fairy’s advent was in July, and for the first month the early morning feeding was no small care; but love makes all things easy, and at last my small charge could feed itself, and had learnt the use of its wings.

Daily baths were taken in my soap-dish, which was amply large enough at first, but now Fairy is promoted to the sponge basin, in which she flutters to her heart’s content and dries herself afterwards by swift flights about the room. The bath over, the next thing is to search for flies on the window-panes or on the floor; these are snapped up as great dainties, and in this way Fairy greatly promoted my comfort all through the heat of August and September, 1893, by keeping my room free of winged insects.

I have only to take Fairy on my finger and direct her attention to a fly on the ceiling, when off she darts, like a hawk after its quarry, and the fly disappears like magic.

I was once much amused to watch her day after day eyeing a large spider in the corner of the room. She evidently considered very deeply whether she could tackle it; it was large and she was small, and for three days she hesitated; but at last her courage was equal to the enterprise, and the spider was seized, minced up, and eaten. My tiny pet lives on grapes, lettuce, flies, meal-worms, and, as great indulgences, cream and sugar; a tin of special bird-food supplies other items of diet. Fairy is in and out of her cage all day, and but for fear of accidents she might have the range of the house, so confident am I that she would not wish to stray from her happy home. Still, she loves an expedition, and once, having flown after me into the hall, I did not see her again for an hour or more; a hunt was

needful, and after searching every room she was at last discovered cheerfully investigating the boxes in a lumber-room at the very top of the house.

I never knew such a clever, fearless little bird. She will put her small body into every corner in search of information; she visits all my friends in turn as they sit at luncheon, pulls their hair, sits on their fingers, tugs their dresses, and is, of course, universally beloved.

I was curious to note whether Fairy would grow restless when the migrating season began, but her abnormal life indoors has so altered her natural instincts that she makes herself quite happy throughout the autumn, and we are truly glad that we are not called to bid adieu to such a lovable companion.

Very naturally some readers may ask, "How can they obtain a tame, happy little pet bird such as my whitethroat now is?" I can only reply, such a thing is not to be bought (or very rarely) for any amount of money, but can be attained by any one who will bring up a young fledgling from its earliest youth, with never-failing love and gentleness. There is no secret about it; it is not a gift bestowed on some and withheld from others, as many seem to suppose, judging from the number of times I have been told, "Oh, you have the gift of taming creatures." I always disclaim the assertion and tell the simple truth, that just as you seek to win the heart of a child by invariable and patient kindness, so these innocent dumb brethren of ours yield us their devoted love if they meet with similar treatment at our hands.

We must not begin the task of bringing up a young bird without counting the cost beforehand. It means rising every morning between four and five, and having little sleep afterwards, for we must imitate the self-denying industry of the mother-bird in providing food for her young ones. If we look out over the dewy lawns at daybreak in spring and summer, we shall see thrushes, blackbirds, robins, and many other birds all actively engaged in searching for worms and insects to supply the needs of their respective families. All through the day we must think of the tender creature we have undertaken to rear, giving it every half-hour as much food as it desires, and keeping it warmly covered from cold and draughts, lest its limbs should be attacked by cramp.

This ailment seems incurable, and is the cruel fate of most fledglings that are brought away from their parents, because people forget that the warmth of the mother-bird is essential to the life of the callow brood, and I, for one, never promote the rearing of young wild birds unless, as in the case of a motherless waif like my Fairy, we try to save a little innocent life by doing what we can to imitate its natural bringing up. Absolute tameness can only be attained by unvarying gentle treatment. Never has Fairy heard a harsh word, or, as far as I know, has she had a fright of any kind.

A single grip of Mungo's cruel little jaws would end her life in a moment, but Fairy does not know it, and she sings on fearlessly as he passes her cage. I believe she would act as a certain much-petted little dog used to do when his mistress pretended to scold him severely; he would look about eagerly to see where the wicked animal addressed could be that he might fly at him. I tried to speak seriously to my small bird one day when she was particularly in my way, but she only gave me several hard pecks, and to my great amusement fought me with her tiny claws much as a gamecock would use his spurs. Fairy has the curious habit, which I have noticed in many small birds, of turning rapid somersaults by way of exercise, springing from a perch on one side of the cage up to the roof, turning over and coming down on her feet like a born acrobat.

It is curious to be able to see human passions manifested in such a tiny creature as my whitethroat, and it can rarely *be seen*, because it is very seldom that a bird is so absolutely tame as to feel free to show itself as it is in reality – fear being the dominant feeling in most captive birds – and that leads to the incessant fluttering and effort to escape, which hinders character from being shown.

When Fairy is out of her cage, if I open a drawer she is certain to show *curiosity*, and flies into it, hops about in her perky way, pecking at one thing and another to find out what each is, her beak being equivalent to a hand, and the only instrument with which she can do anything. I put some delicacy on my finger, and then she comes, and by her actions and low chirping she shows *pleasure*.

Before long, her sweet warbling song expresses *contentment*, her little sky is serene and clear, all her wants are provided for, she has no cares for the morrow, and her happy little nature comes out in cheery songs.

She picks a scarlet flower petal, and I am not sure but it may be poisonous and bad for her, so, like a careful mother, I take it out of her beak. Then comes unmistakable *anger*; she scolds and pecks at my fingers, and wilfully tries to get the flower petal back again.

All this is wonderfully human, and all to be found in a creature not two inches in length! If Fairy could be seen minus her feathers she would be about the size of a walnut! I do think in all respects a *bird* is one of the principal marvels of creation, most lovely and lovable. See the little creature taking a bath, reducing itself to a disreputable tuft of draggled feathers for the sake of cleanliness, and then fluttering and shaking itself dry again, and by means of its wonderful beak pluming its feathers into order, applying oil to them from its little gland just above the tail, and after infinite pains ending by looking soft and sleek as a piece of satin.

Instinct teaches it to do all this which we could no more imitate than we could fly. Then how touching is the motherhood of a bird. Many a human mother is put to shame by the example of a little feathered thing which has only instinct to guide her in preparing her soft, warm nursery, to which love ties her closely for two or three weeks. Bright days come and go, but she denies herself all the pleasures she sees other birds enjoying, and barely takes time to get her needful food, that she may keep warm those two little snowy eggs which are all the world to her even now, and when young creatures begin to stir beneath her faithful breast then she exchanges the quiescent life for one of incessant toil that her callow brood may not call to her in vain for the insect diet which she has to provide.

By the time the young ones can feed themselves the parents are quite thin and worn with their incessant toil, and yet in favourable seasons some kinds of birds rear a second or even a third family before the summer is over.

Although the Whitethroat is plentiful in the southern counties, I do not find that people, as a rule, are at all familiar with its appearance, and I imagine this arises from the shy habits of the bird. It flits nimbly out of sight when alarmed, and being of an inconspicuous grey colour, it requires a keen eye to distinguish it when hopping noiselessly about in weedy hedgerows, where it is so often found that it has obtained the provincial name of Nettle Creeper.

With reference to the migration of the Whitethroat, I learn from one of Canon Tristram's delightful books on birds, that Algeria is its winter retreat. He says: —

“Each portion of the Sahara – the rocky ridges, the sand drifts, the plains – has its peculiar ornithological characteristics. But by far the most interesting localities are, as might have been anticipated, the dayats and the oases. Here are the winter quarters of many of our familiar summer visitants. The chiff-chaff, willow-wren, and whitethroat hop on every twig in the gardens shadowed by the never-failing palm; the swallow and the window martin thread the lanes and sport over the mouths of the wells in pursuit of the swarming mosquitoes.”

When spring returns, these smaller birds are led by instinct to re-cross the Mediterranean and seek their European haunts where the temperature has again become sufficiently mild to enable them to find insect food and rear their families of nestlings.

The sharp clicking note, like two stones jarred together, which this bird makes when excited, we constantly hear in our furze-bushes and hedges, proving that the whitethroat exists in some numbers in Middlesex; and now that my “Fairy” has begun to sing, I find it is a strain with which I am quite familiar. My curiosity had often been excited by hearing low, soft warbles from unseen singers on the common or in the woods; I vainly tried to see what bird it could be, but it always seemed to remain out of sight. My small pet has solved the mystery by performing for my private benefit the sweet music of her wild brethren out of doors.

I am constantly reminded of the lines in Coleridge's “Ancient Mariner”: —

“A noise like of a hidden brook  
In the leafy month of June,  
That to the sleeping woods all night  
Singeth a quiet tune.”

As I sit at my writing, the delicate soft warbling goes on hour after hour, and is a source of real pleasure to me, so manifestly is it the outcome of a perfectly happy little spirit telling out its inward joy in its own sweet fashion.

Captivity has no terrors for Fairy; she loves her cage, and will hardly leave it except when she occasionally takes a swift flight to and fro, and then alights on my notepaper to give a peck at my pen. She delights in sitting on the fender, fluffing up her feathers to revel in the warmth, which, in winter, is her substitute for sunshine, and before long she returns to her own little home, where she may be seen gracefully sipping the sweet juice of a grape before recommencing her song.

I often wonder how long this, my latest pet, may be spared to me! A bird's life is such a tender thing – a moment's carelessness may rob one of a cherished pet, and the greatest care will not always guard such a tiny swift-flying bird from injury.

May the sorrowful day be far distant that shall see me bereft of my little ray of home sunshine, my Fairy Whitethroat!

## ASNAPPER

“Heard ye the Owl  
Hoot to her mate responsive? 'Twas not she  
Whom, floating on white pinions near his barn,  
The farmer views well-pleased, and bids his boy  
Forbear her nest; but she who, cloth'd in robe  
Of unobtrusive brown, regardless flies  
Mouse-haunted corn-stacks and the thresher's floor,  
And prowls for plunder in the lonely wood.”

## ASNAPPER

### THE BROWN OWL

WHILST enjoying the fresh beauty of my garden in the month of May, with its wealth of flowers and rich variety of leafage, my eyes happened to light upon a greyish tuft of feathers in a rhododendron bush. Curiosity led me to examine this tuft more closely, when, to my surprise, I found it was a young brown owl – alive, but in a very exhausted condition. It appeared to be only a few weeks old, fully feathered, but unable to feed itself; I suppose it had fallen out of the nest and was dying for lack of food. I need hardly say I carried it indoors, and did my best to feed and restore the poor orphan, and right well did he second my efforts. A juicy uncooked mutton chop was cut up and mixed with feathers, and with resounding snaps of his great beak the morsels were received and swallowed. A second chop was disposed of before my friend seemed satisfied, and with such a mighty appetite I felt there would be no difficulty in rearing this vigorous infant. Next morning I found two sparrows and a mouse had been obtained. These soon disappeared, and had to be supplemented by a piece of raw meat. And if this is the daily diet of a very young owl, we may form some idea of the way in which full-grown birds must reduce the hordes of mice and rats which would otherwise overrun the country.

Whenever we passed the owl's cage he gave a resounding snap with his beak, not viciously but as a friendly recognition, and somehow this habit suggested the name of the Assyrian king, the “noble Asnapper,” and this, familiarly contracted to “Snap” for every-day use, became the recognised title of our new pet.

Asnapper lived quietly enough during the day in a large cage well covered from the light, but towards evening, when he had enjoyed his second repast of raw meat, he began to wake up and long for exercise. He was allowed his liberty in the house, and made full use of this privilege by going about from room to room, either running along the floor like a grey rabbit, or taking short flights with his noiseless wings. He would gravely pursue his way up the stairs a step at a time, and seemed to enjoy watching cattle in the fields whilst sitting motionless on a window-sill.

Until the bird could feed himself it would have been no kindness to let him go out of doors and starve, so I resolved to make the creature's life as happy as possible, whilst I had thus a good opportunity of learning the habits of an interesting species of bird. I could not help being somewhat afraid of his formidable curved beak, which looked as if it could inflict a severe wound, but I soon learned how gently Asnapper could use it; he would play with my fingers and hold them with such

care that we had merry games of play at evening recreation time, when he looked to be let out of his cage and go where he pleased for an hour or two.

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