

EWALD CARL

THE QUEEN BEE, AND
OTHER NATURE STORIES

Carl Ewald

**The Queen Bee, and
Other Nature Stories**

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PREFACE

BY THE TRANSLATOR

Carl Ewald's "Æventyr" or Nature Stories are well known and very popular in Denmark and the rest of Scandinavia, though they have never before this been brought to the notice of English readers. There are a number of series of them, the first of which consists of the stories given in this little book.

This first series appeared in 1882, but took its definitive form in the edition of 1895. When it first appeared, it was introduced by a preface written by the author's father, the well-known historical novelist, H. F. Ewald. This preface ran as follows: —

"It has often been a subject of complaint that our story books, with their nixies, trolls, and bewitched princes and princesses, give children superstitious ideas, and affect their imagination in a way which is not the best possible.

"The author of the little stories to which I am writing a word of preface has struck out a way of his own. Holding that Nature, with its manifold and many-coloured life, contains new material on which children in their own way can draw, he has taken as the subject of his stories the phenomena of natural history.

"As I think, he has performed his task in a taking and attractive manner, the child's fancy being sufficiently enthralled at the same time that it gets a true conception of the working of natural forces, a conception which will fix itself in the memory all the better for its poetical clothing.

"It seems to me that the author's view is a sound one, so I gladly recommend his little book to parents who wish their children to read what is both pleasurable and instructive."

There are some touches in the stories, of course, which belong rather to Denmark than England — for example, the custom of ringing the church bells at sunset, the complete disappearance of starlings in the winter months, the "starlings' box" which is ready for them to rest in on their return, the presence of the stork. The phenomenon of beech forests extruding and supplanting oak forests (referred to by Dr. Wallace in "Darwinism" as one of the most striking instances of "natural selection") is one of which there are clearer traces in Scandinavian countries than in Great Britain. But, on the whole, Nature is the same in England as in Denmark, and the English child who learns natural history from these stories will not be misdirected.

Meanwhile, I hope that these stories of Carl Ewald will be loved for their own sake as stories merely. They have so much poetical imagination, ingenuity of incident, and bright wit, that they seem entitled to some share in the popularity accorded to the children's tales of another Danish writer, Hans Christian Andersen. Some English children have already listened to them eagerly, and many others, I hope, will take them into their favour when they are sent out into the world. They may even be read with pleasure by some who are children no longer. If this is not so, the fault must lie with the translator.

G. C. Moore Smith.

Sheffield, 1907.

A DEDICATION

(After CARL EWALD.)

We strayed, thy little hand in mine,
One summer morning fresh and fine,
In a wood where birches met;
A great sun-bonnet served as frame
To rounded childish cheeks aflame —
Thy voice is ringing yet!
Of birdies' songs, of flowers, of trees —
Whate'er thy tender mind could seize —
I wove thee tales, my pet:
Ah, thou canst not remember it,
And I can ne'er forget!

And now my locks are thin and gray,
For years since then have slipped away,
For gladness or regret!
And ah, the woods where now I roam,
And those wide chambers of my home,
Know thee no more, Ninette!
Since I shall never find thee then,
Oh, let this Book remind thee then
Of a wood where birches met:
For thou canst not remember it,
And I can ne'er forget!

EWALD'S DANISH NATURE STORIES

Series I

The Queen Bee

THE farmer opened his hive. "Off with you!" he said to the bees. "The sun is shining, and everywhere the flowers are coming out, so that it is a joy to see them. Get to work, and gather a good lot of honey for me to sell to the shopkeeper in the autumn. 'Many a streamlet makes a river,' and you know these are bad times for farmers."

"What does that matter to us?" said the bees. But all the same they flew out; for they had been sitting all the winter in the hive, and they longed for a breath of fresh air.

They hummed and buzzed, they stretched their legs, they tried their wings. They swarmed out in all directions; they crawled up and down the hive; they flew off to the flowers and bushes, or wandered all round on the ground. There were hundreds and hundreds of them.

Last of all came the queen. She was bigger than the others, and it was she who ruled the hive.

"Stop your nonsense, little children," she said, "and set to work and do something. A good bee does not idle, but turns to with a will and makes good use of its time."

So she divided them into parties and set them to work.

"You over there, fly out and see if there is any honey in the flowers. The others can collect flower-dust, and when you come home give it in smartly to the old bees in the hive."

Away they flew at once. But all the very young ones stayed behind. They made the last party, for they had never been out with the others.

"What are *we* to do?" they asked.

"You! you must perspire," said the queen. "One, two, three! Then we can begin our work."

And they perspired as well as they had learned to, and the prettiest yellow wax came out of their bodies.

"Good!" said the queen. "Now we will begin to build."

The old bees took the wax, and began to build a number of little six-sided cells, all alike and close up to one another. All the time they were building, the others came flying in with flower-dust and honey, which they laid at the queen's feet.

"We can now knead the dough," she said. "But first put a little honey in – that makes it taste so much better."

They kneaded and kneaded, and before very long they had made some pretty little loaves of bee-bread, which they carried into the cells.

"Now let us go on with the building," commanded the queen bee, and they perspired wax and built for all they were worth.

"And now *my* work begins," said the queen, and she heaved a deep sigh; for her work was the hardest work of all.

She sat down in the middle of the hive and began to lay her eggs. She laid great heaps of them, and the bees were kept very busy running with the little eggs in their mouths and carrying them into the new cells. Each egg had a little cell to itself; and when they had all been put in their places, the queen gave orders to fix doors to all the cells and shut them fast.

"Good!" she said, when this was done. "I want you now to build me ten fine big rooms in the out-of-the-way parts of the hive."

The bees had them ready in no time, and then the queen laid ten pretty eggs, one in each of the big rooms, and the doors were fixed as before.

Every day the bees flew in and out, gathering great heaps of honey and flower-dust; but in the evening, when their work was done, they would open the doors just a crack and have a peep at the eggs.

"Take care," the queen said one day. "They are coming!"

And all the eggs burst at once, and in every cell lay a pretty little bee-baby.

"What funny creatures!" said the young bees. "They have no eyes, and where are their legs and wings?"

"They are grubs," said the queen. "You simpletons looked just like that yourselves once upon a time. One must be a grub before one can become a bee. Be quick now, and give them something to eat."

The bees bestirred themselves to feed the little ones, but they were not equally kind to them all. The ten, however, that lay in the large cells got as much to eat as ever they wanted, and every day a great quantity of honey was carried in to them.

"They are princesses," said the queen, "so you must treat them well. The others you can stint; they are only working people, and they must accustom themselves to be content with what they can get."

And every morning the poor little wretches got a little piece of bee-bread and nothing more, and with that they had to be satisfied, though they were ever so hungry.

In one of the little six-sided cells close by the princesses' chambers lay a little tiny grub. She was the youngest of them all, and only just come out of the egg. She could not see, but she could plainly hear the grown-up bees talking outside, and for a while she lay quite still and kept her thoughts to herself.

All at once she said out loud, "I could eat a little more," and she knocked at her door.

"You have had enough for to-day," answered the old bee who was appointed to be head bee-nurse, creeping up and down in the passage outside.

"Maybe, but I am hungry!" shouted the little grub. "I will go into one of the princesses' chambers; I have not room to stir here."

"Just listen to her!" said the old bee mockingly. "One would think by the demands she makes that she was a fine little princess. You are born to toil and drudge, my little friend. You are a mere working bee, and you will never be anything else all your days."

"But I want to be queen!" cried the grub, and thumped on the door.

Of course the old bee did not answer such nonsense, but went on to the others. From every side they were calling out for more food, and the little grub could hear it all.

"It is hard, though," she thought, "that we should have to be so hungry."

And then she knocked on the princess's wall and called to her, "Give me a little of your honey. Let me come into your chamber. I am lying here so hungry, and I am just as good as you."

"Are you? Just you wait till I am a reigning queen," said the princess. "You may be sure that when that time comes I shall not forget your impertinence."

But she had scarcely said this before the other princesses began to cry out in the most dreadful manner.

"*You're* not going to be queen! *I* shall be queen! *I* shall be queen!" they shrieked all together, and they began to knock on the walls and make a frightful disturbance.

The head bee-nurse came running up in an instant and opened the doors.

"What are your graces' orders?" she asked, dropping a curtsy and scraping the ground with her feet.

"More honey!" they shouted, all in one voice. "But me first – me first. I am the one who is to be queen."

"In a moment, in a moment, your graces," she answered, and ran off as fast as her six legs could carry her.

She soon came back with many other bees. They were dragging ever so much honey, which they crammed down the cross little princesses' throats. And then they got them to hold their tongues and lie still and rest.

But the little grub lay awake, thinking over what had happened. She longed so much for some honey that she began to shake the door again.

"Give me some honey! I can't stand it any longer. I am just as good as the others."

The old bee tried to hush her.

"Hold your tongue, little bawler! The queen's coming."

And at the same moment the queen bee came.

"Go your ways," she said to the bees; "I wish to be alone."

For a long time she stood in silence before the princesses' chambers.

"Now they are lying there asleep," she said at last. "From morning till evening they do nothing but eat and sleep, and they grow bigger and fatter every day. In a few days they will be full grown, and will creep out of their cells. Then my turn will be over. I know that too well. I have heard the bees saying to one another that they would like to have a younger and more beautiful queen, and they will chase me away in disgrace. But I will not submit to it. To-morrow I will kill them all; then I can remain queen till I die."

Then she went away. But the little grub had heard all she said.

"Dear me!" she thought; "it is really a pity about the little princesses. They are certainly very uppish, and they have not been nice to me, but still it would be sad if the wicked queen killed them. I think I will tell the old growler outside in the passage all about it."

She began once more knocking at the door, and the head bee-nurse came running up, but this time she was fearfully angry.

"You must mind what you are doing, my good grub," she said. "You are the youngest of them all, and you are the worst for making a noise. Next time I shall tell the queen."

"First listen to me," said the grub, and she told her about the queen's wicked design.

"Good gracious! is that true?" cried the old nurse, and beat her wings in horror. And without hearing a word more, she hurried off to tell the other bees.

"I think I deserve a little honey for what I have done," said the little grub. "But I can now lie down and sleep with a good conscience."

Next evening, when the queen thought that all the bees were in bed, she came to kill the princesses. The grub could hear her talking aloud to herself. But she was quite afraid of the wicked queen, and dared not stir.

"I hope she won't kill the princesses," she thought, and squeezed herself nearer to the door to hear what happened.

The queen looked cautiously round on all sides, and then opened the first of the doors. But at the same moment the bees swarmed out from all directions, seized her by the legs and wings, and dragged her out.

"What is the matter?" she cried. "Are you raising a rebellion?"

"No, your majesty," answered the bees, with great reverence; "but we know that you are intending to kill the princesses, and *that* you shall not be allowed to do. What would become of us in the autumn after your majesty's death?"

"Let me go!" cried the queen, and tried to get away. "I am queen now anyway, and have the power to do what I like. How do you know that I shall die in the autumn?"

But the bees held her fast, and dragged her outside the hive. There they set her free, but she shook her wings in a passion and said to them, —

"You are disloyal subjects, who are not worth ruling over. I won't stay here an hour longer, but I will go out into the world and build a new nest. Are there any of you who will come with me?"

Some of the old bees, who had been grubs at the same time as the queen, declared that they would follow her. And soon after they flew away.

"Now we have no queen," said the others, "we must take good care of the princesses." And so they crammed them with honey from morning till night; and they grew, and grabbed, and squabbled, and made more noise each day than the day before.

As for the little grub, no one gave a single thought to her.

One morning the doors of the princesses' chambers flew open, and all ten of them stepped out, beautiful full-grown queen bees. The other bees ran up and gazed at them in admiration.

"How pretty they are!" they said. "It is hard to say which is the most beautiful."

"I am!" one cried.

"You make a mistake," said another, and stabbed her with her sting.

"You are rather conceited," shrieked a third. "I imagine that *I* am rather prettier than you are."

And immediately they all began calling out at once, and soon after began to fight with one another as hard as ever they could.

The bees would have liked to separate them, but the old head bee-nurse said to them, —

"Let them go on fighting; then we shall see which of them is the strongest, and we will choose her to be our queen. We can't do with more than one."

At this the bees formed round in a ring and looked on at the battle. It lasted a long time, and it was fiercely fought. Wings and legs which had been bitten off were flying about in the air, and after some time eight of the princesses lay dead upon the ground. The two last were still fighting. One of them had lost all her wings, and the other had only four legs left.

"She will be a poor sort of queen whichever of the two we get," said one of the bees. "We should have done better to have kept the old one."

But she might have spared herself the remark, for in the same moment the princesses gave each other such a stab with their stings that they both fell dead as a door-nail.

"That is a pretty business!" called the bees, and ran about among each other in dismay. "Now we have no queen! What shall we do? what shall we do?"

In despair they crawled about the hive, and did not know which way to turn. But the oldest and cleverest sat in a corner and held a council. For a long time they talked this way and that as to what they should decide on doing in their unhappy circumstances. But at last the head bee-nurse got a hearing, and said, —

"I can tell you how you can get out of the difficulty, if you will but follow my advice. I remember that the same misfortune happened to us in this hive a long time ago. I was then a grub myself. I lay in my cell, and distinctly heard what took place. All the princesses had killed one another, and the old queen had gone out into the world: it was just as it is now. But the bees took one of us grubs and laid her in one of the princesses' cells. They fed her every day with the finest and best honey in the whole hive; and when she was full-grown, she was a charming and good queen. I can clearly remember the whole affair, for I thought at the time that they might just as well have taken me. But we may do the same thing again. I propose that we act in the same way."

The bees were delighted, and cried that they would willingly do so, and they ran off at once to fetch a grub.

"Wait a moment," cried the head bee-nurse, "and take me with you. At any rate, I will come and help you. Consider now. It must be one of the youngest grubs, for she must have time to think over her new position. When one has been brought up to be a mere drudge, it is not easy to accustom oneself to wear a crown."

That also seemed to the bees to be wise, and the old one went on, —

"Close by the side of the princesses' cells lies a little grub. She is the youngest of them all. She must have learnt a good deal by hearing the princesses' refined conversation, and I have noticed that she has some character. Besides, it was she who was honourable enough to tell me about the wicked intentions of the old queen. Let us take her."

At once they went in a solemn procession to the six-sided cell where the little grub lay. The head bee-nurse politely knocked at the door, opened it cautiously, and told the grub what the bees had decided. At first she could hardly believe her own ears; but when they had carried her carefully into one of the large, delightful chambers, and brought her as much honey as she could eat, she perceived that it was all in earnest.

"So I am to be queen after all," she said to the head bee-nurse. "You would not believe it, you old growler!"

"I hope that your majesty will forget the rude remarks that I made at the time you lay in the six-sided cell," said the old bee, with a respectful bow.

"I forgive you," said the new-baked princess. "Fetch me some more honey."

A little time after the grub was full grown, and stepped out of her cell as big and as beautiful as the bees could wish. And besides, she knew how to command.

"Away with you!" she said. "We must have more honey for our use in the winter, and you others must perspire more wax. I am thinking of building a new wing to the hive. The new princesses shall live there next year; it is very unsuitable for them to be so near common grubs."

"Heyday!" said the bees to one another. "One would think she had been a queen ever since she lay in the egg."

"No," said the head bee-nurse; "that is not so. But she has had *queenly thoughts*, and that is the great thing."

The Anemones

"Peewee! peewee!" cried the plover, as he flew over the bog in the wood. "My Lady Spring is coming! I can tell it from the feeling in my legs and wings."

When the new grass that lay below in the earth heard that, it pushed up at once and peeped out merrily from among the old yellow grass of last year. For the grass is always in a great hurry.

The anemones in among the trees also heard the plover's cry; but they, on the contrary, would not come up yet on any account.

"You must not believe the plover," they whispered to one another. "He is a gay young spark who is not to be depended upon. He always comes too early, and begins crying out at once. No, we will wait quietly till the starlings and swallows come. They are sensible, steady-going people who know what's what, and don't go sailing with half a wind."

And then the starlings came. They perched on the stumps in front of their summer villa, and looked about them.

"Too early as usual," said Daddy Starling. "Not a green leaf and not a fly to be seen, except an old tough one from last year, which isn't worth opening one's bill for."

Mother Starling said nothing, but she did not seem any more enchanted with the prospect.

"If we had only stayed in our cosy winter home down there beyond the mountains," said Daddy Starling. He was angry at his wife's not answering him, because he was so cold that he thought it might do him good to have a little fun. "But it is *your* fault, as it was last year. You are always in such a dreadful hurry to come out to the country."

"If I am in a hurry, I know the reason for it," said Mother Starling. "And you ought to be ashamed of yourself if you didn't know it also, since they are your eggs just as much as mine."

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