

Lady Mary and her Nurse

Catherine Parr Traill

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Title: Lady Mary and her Nurse

Author: Catherine Parr Traill

Release Date: September, 2004 [EBook #6479]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on December 20, 2002]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LADY MARY AND HER NURSE *****

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LADY MARY AND HER NURSE;

OR,

A PEEP INTO THE CANADIAN FOREST.

by

MRS. TRAILL

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A PEEP INTO THE CANADIAN FOREST.

CHAPTER I.

THE FLYING SQUIRREL--ITS FOOD--STORY OF A WOLF--INDIAN VILLAGE--WILD RICE.

"Nurse, what is the name of that pretty creature you have in your hand? What bright eyes it has! What a soft tail, just like a grey feather! Is it a little beaver?" asked the Governor's [Footnote: Lady Mary's father was Governor of Canada.] little daughter, as her nurse came into the room where her young charge, whom we shall call Lady Mary, was playing with her doll.

Carefully sheltered against her breast, its velvet nose just peeping from beneath her muslin neckerchief, the nurse held a small grey-furred animal, of the most delicate form and colour.

"No, my lady," she replied, "this is not a young beaver; a beaver is a much larger animal. A beaver's tail is not covered with fur; it is scaly, broad, and flat; it looks something like black leather, not very unlike that of my seal-skin slippers. The Indians eat beavers' tails at their great feasts, and think they make an excellent dish."

"If they are black, and look like leather shoes, I am very sure I should not like to eat them; so, if you please, Mrs. Frazer, do not let me have any beavers' tails cooked for my dinner," said the little lady in a very decided tone.

"Indeed, my lady," replied her nurse, smiling, "it would not be an easy thing to obtain, if you wished to taste one, for beavers are not brought to our market. It is only the Indians and hunters who know how to trap them, and beavers are not so plentiful as they used to be."

Mrs. Frazer would have told Lady Mary a great deal about the way in which the trappers take the beavers, but the little girl interrupted her by saying, "Please, nurse, will you tell me the name of your pretty pet? Ah, sweet thing! what bright eyes you have!" she added, caressing the soft little head which was just seen from beneath the folds of the muslin handkerchief to which it timidly nestled, casting furtive glances at the admiring child, while the panting of its breast told the mortal terror that shook its frame whenever the little girl's hand was advanced to coax its soft back.

"It is a flying squirrel, Lady Mary," replied her nurse; "one of my brothers caught it a month ago, when he was chopping in the forest. He thought it might amuse your ladyship, and so he tamed it and sent it to me in a basket filled with moss, with some acorns, and hickory-nuts, and beech-mast for him to eat on his journey, for the little fellow has travelled a long way: he came from the beech-woods near the town of Coburg, in the Upper Province."

"And where is Coburg, nurse? Is it a large city like Montreal or Quebec?"

"No, my lady; it is a large town on the shores of the great Lake Ontario."

"And are there many woods near it?"

"Yes; but not so many as there used to be many years ago. The forest is almost all cleared, and there are fields of wheat and Indian corn, and nice farms and pretty houses, where a few years back the lofty forest grew dark and thick."

"Nurse, you said there were acorns, and hickory-nuts, and beech-mast in the basket. I have seen acorns at home in dear England and Scotland, and I have eaten the hickory-nuts here; but what is beech-mast? Is it in granaries for winter stores; and wild ducks and wild pigeons come from the far north at the season when the beech-mast fall, to eat them; for God teaches these, His creatures, to know the times and the seasons when His bounteous hand is open to give them food from His boundless store. A great many other birds and beasts also feed upon the beech-mast."

"It was very good of your brother to send me this pretty creature, nurse," said the little lady; "I will ask Papa to give him some money."

"There is no need of that, Lady Mary. My brother is not in want; he has a farm in the Upper Province, and is very well off."

"I am glad he is well off," said Lady Mary; "indeed, I do not see so many beggars here as in England."

"People need not beg in Canada, if they are well and strong and can work; a poor man can soon earn enough money to keep himself and his little ones."

"Nurse, will you be so kind as to ask Campbell to get a pretty cage for my squirrel? I will let him live close to my dormice, who will be pleasant company for him, and I will feed him every day myself with nuts and sugar, and sweet cake and white bread. Now do not tremble and look so frightened, as though I were going to hurt you; and pray, Mr. Squirrel, do not bite. Oh! nurse, nurse, the wicked, spiteful creature has bitten my finger! See, see, it has made it bleed! Naughty thing! I will not love you if you bite. Pray, nurse, bind up my finger, or it will soil my frock."

Great was the pity bestowed upon the wound by Lady Mary's kind attendant, till the little girl, tired of hearing so much said about the bitten finger, gravely desired her maid to go in search of the cage, and catch the truant, which had effected its escape, and was clinging to the curtains of the bed. The cage was procured--a large wooden cage, with an outer and an inner chamber, a bar for the little fellow to swing himself on, and a drawer for his food, and a little dish for his water. The sleeping-room was furnished by the nurse with soft wool, and a fine store of nuts was put in the drawer; all his wants were well supplied, and Lady Mary watched the catching of the little animal with much interest. Great was the activity displayed by the runaway squirrel, and still greater the astonishment evinced by the Governor's little daughter, at the flying leaps made by the squirrel in its attempts to elude the grasp of its pursuers.

"It flies! I am sure it must have wings. Look, look, nurse! it is here, now it is on the wall, now on the curtains! It must have wings, but it has no feathers!"

"It has no wings, dear lady, but it has a fine ridge of

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