

ERNEST THOMPSON SETON



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Old Lobo's band was but a small one. This I never quite understood, for usually, when a wolf rises to the position and power that he had, he attracts a numerous following. It may be that he had as many as he desired, or perhaps his ferocious temper prevented the increase of his pack. Certain is it that Lobo had only five followers during the latter part of his reign. Each of these, however, was a wolf of renown, most of them were above the ordinary size, one in particular, the second in command, was a veritable giant, but even he was far below the leader in size and prowess. Several of the band, besides the two leaders, were especially noted. One of those was a beautiful white wolf that the Mexicans called Blanca; this was supposed to be a female, possibly Lobo's mate. Another was a yellow wolf of remarkable swiftness, which, according to current stories had, on several occasions, captured an antelope for the pack.

It will be seen, then, that these wolves were thoroughly well-known to the cowboys and shepherds. They were frequently seen and oftener heard, and their lives were intimately associated with those of the cattlemen, who would so gladly have destroyed them. There was not a stockman on the Currumpaw who would not readily have given the value of many steers for the scalp of any one of Lobo's band, but they seemed to possess charmed lives, and defied all manner of devices to kill them. They scorned all hunters, derided all poisons, and continued, for at least five years, to exact their tribute from the Currumpaw ranchers to the extent, many said, of a cow each day. According to this estimate, therefore, the band had killed more than two thousand of the finest stock, for, as was only too well-known, they selected the best in every instance.

The old idea that a wolf was constantly in a starving state, and therefore ready to eat anything, was as far as possible from the truth in this case, for these freebooters were always sleek and well-conditioned, and were in fact most fastidious about what they ate. Any animal that had died from natural causes, or that was diseased or tainted, they would not touch, and they even rejected anything that had been killed by the stockmen. Their choice and daily food was the tenderer part of a freshly killed yearling heifer. An old bull or cow they disdained, and though they occasionally took a young calf or colt, it was quite clear that veal or horseflesh was not their favorite diet. It was also known that they were not fond of mutton, although they often amused themselves by killing sheep. One night in November 1893, Blanca and the yellow wolf killed two hundred and fifty sheep, apparently for the fun of it, and did not eat an ounce of their flesh.

These are examples of many stories, which I might repeat, to show the ravages of this destructive band. Many new devices for their extinction were tried each year, but still they lived and thrived in spite of all the efforts of their foes. A great price was set on Lobo's head, and in consequence poison in a score of subtle forms was put out for him, but he never failed to detect and avoid it. One thing only he feared—that was firearms, and knowing full well that all men in this region carried them, he never was known to attack or face a human being. Indeed, the set policy of his band was to take refuge in flight whenever, in the daytime, a man was descried, no matter at what distance. Lobo's habit of permitting the pack to eat only that which they themselves had killed, was in numerous cases their salvation, and the keenness of his scent to detect the

REDRUFF, THE STORY OF THE DON VALLEY PARTRIDGE

I

DOWN THE wooded slope of Taylor's Hill the Mother Partridge led her brood; down toward the crystal brook that by some strange whim was called Mud Creek. Her little ones were one day old but already quick on foot, and she was taking them for the first time to drink.

She walked slowly, crouching low as she went, for the woods were full of enemies. She was uttering a soft little cluck in her throat, a call to the little balls of mottled down that on their tiny pink legs came toddling after, and peeping softly and plaintively if left even a few inches behind, and seeming so fragile they made the very chickadees look big and coarse. There were twelve of them, but Mother Grouse watched them all, and she watched every bush and tree and thicket, and the whole woods and the sky itself. Always for enemies she seemed seeking—friends were too scarce to be looked for—and an enemy she found. Away across the level beaver meadow was a great brute of a fox. He was coming their way, and in a few moments would surely wind them or strike their trail. There was no time to lose.

“Krrr! Krrr!” (Hide!! Hide!) cried the mother in a low firm voice, and the little bits of things, scarcely bigger than acorns and but a day old, scattered far (a few inches) apart to hide. One dived under a leaf, another between two roots, a third crawled into a curl of birchbark, a fourth into a hole, and so on, till all were hidden but one who could find no cover, so squatted on a broad yellow chip and lay very flat, and closed his eyes very tight, sure that now he was safe from being seen. They ceased their frightened peeping and all was still.

Mother Partridge flew straight toward the dreaded beast, alighted fearlessly a few yards to one side of him, and then flung herself on the ground, flopping as though winged and lame—oh, so dreadfully lame—and whining like a distressed puppy. Was she begging for mercy—mercy from a bloodthirsty, cruel fox? Oh, dear no! She was no fool. One often hears of the cunning of the fox. Wait and see what a fool he is compared with a mother-partridge. Elated at the prize so suddenly within his reach, the fox turned with a dash and caught—at least, no, he didn't quite catch the bird; she flopped by chance just a foot out of reach. He followed with another jump and would have seized her this time surely, but somehow a sapling came just between, and the partridge dragged herself awkwardly away and under a log, but the great brute snapped his jaws and hounded over the log, while she, seeming a trifle less lame, made another clumsy forward spring and tumbled down a bank, and Reynard, keenly following, almost caught her tail, but, oddly enough, fast as he went and leaped, she still seemed just a trifle faster. It was most extraordinary. A winged partridge and he, Reynard, the Swift-foot, had not caught her

the hook. But nature had prepared him for the slippery footing; his toes, so slim and trim in September, had sprouted rows of sharp, horny points, and these grew with the growing cold, till the first snow had found him fully equipped with snow-shoes and icecreepers. The cold weather had driven away most of the hawks and owls, and made it impossible for his four-footed enemies to approach unseen, so that things were nearly balanced.

His flight in search of food had daily led him farther on, till he had discovered and explored the Rosedale Creek, with its banks of silver-birch, and Castle Frank, with its grapes and rowan berries, as well as Chester woods, where amelanchier and Virginia-creeper swung their fruit-bunches, and checkerberries glowed beneath the snow.

He soon found out that for some strange reason men with guns did not go within the high fence of Castle Frank. So among these scenes he lived his life, learning new places, new foods, and grew wiser and more beautiful every day.

He was quite alone so far as kindred were concerned, but that scarcely seemed a hardship. Wherever he went he could see the jolly chickadees scrambling merrily about, and he remembered the time when they had seemed such big, important creatures. They were the most absurdly cheerful things in the woods. Before the autumn was fairly over they had begun to sing their famous refrain, "Spring Soon," and kept it up with good heart more or less all through the winter's direst storms, till at length the waning of the Hunger Moon, our February, seemed really to lend some point to the ditty, and they redoubled their optimistic announcement to the world in an "I-told-you-so" mood. Soon

good support was found, for the sun gained strength and melted the snow from the southern slope of Castle Frank Hill, and exposed great banks of fragrant wintergreen, whose berries were a bounteous feast for Redruff, and, ending the hard work of pulling frozen browse, gave his bill the needed chance to grow into its proper shape again. Very soon the first bluebird came flying over and warbled as he flew, "The spring is coming." The sun kept gaining, and early one day in the dark of the Wakening Moon of March there was a loud "Caw, caw," and old Silver-spot, the king-crow, came swinging along from the south at the head of his troops and officially announced,

"THE SPRING HAS COME."

All nature seemed to respond to this, the opening of the birds' New Year, and yet it was something within that chiefly seemed to move them. The chickadees went simply wild; they sang their "Spring now, spring now now—Spring now now," so persistently that one wondered how they found time to get a living.

And Redruff felt it thrill him through and through. He sprang with joyous vigor on a stump and sent rolling down the little valley, again and again, a thundering "Thump, thump, thump, thunderrrrrrrr," that wakened dull echoes as it rolled, and voiced his gladness in the coming of the spring.

Away down the valley was Cuddy's shanty. He heard the drum-call on the still morning air and "reckoned there was a cock partridge to git," and came sneaking up the ravine with his gun. But Redruff skimmed away in silence, nor rested till once more in Mud Creek Glen. And there he mounted the very log where first he had drummed and rolled his loud tattoo again and again, till a small boy who had taken a short cut to the