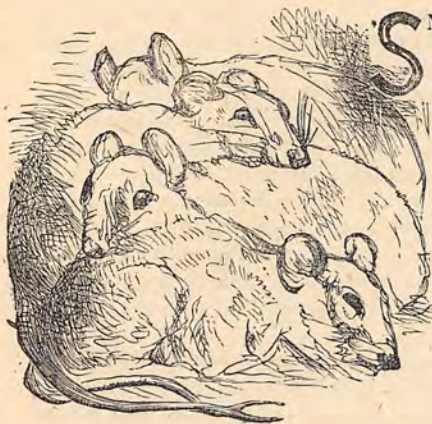


ANOTHER LITTLE FRIEND.



SMALLEST of mammals, and most interesting of rodents, is the Harvest Mouse. The colour of its body is uniform reddish-brown, except the under part of the neck, stomach, and thighs,

which are white. This colour, however, varies—probably with age; and after long confinement the fur loses much of its brightness. The harvest mouse is a far more suitable pet for a cage than any of its numerous relations, for it is decidedly uncommon, it is smaller and more active than any other mouse, its smell is neither so strong nor so offensive as that of white mice; it is lively by day, which the dormouse is not; and it has a prehensile tail, enabling it to climb about in strange attitudes, hang head downwards from a perch, and perform other monkey-like evolutions. Besides, it readily resigns itself to captivity, exhibiting no shyness on being taken, beyond an occasional nibbling at the wires, which, after all, may not denote a wish to get out, for we all know that mice would not be happy if they were not nibbling.

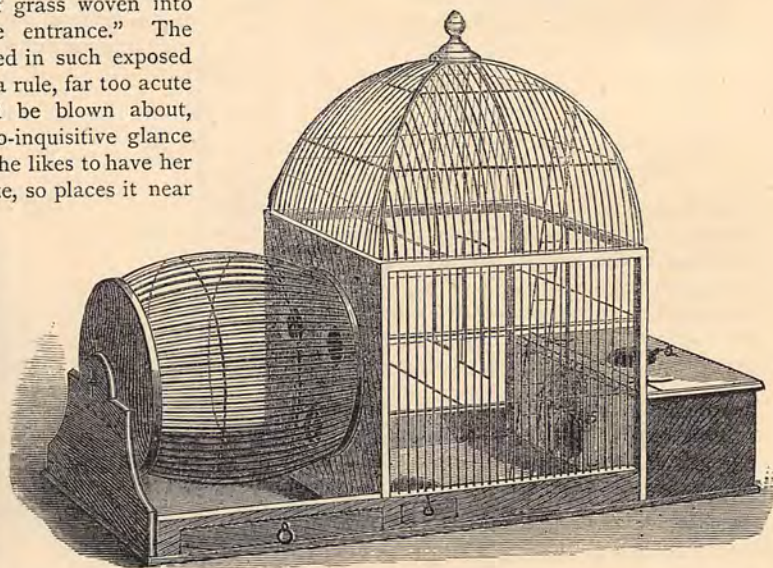
Some natural-history books say: "The nest of the harvest mouse may be found attached to the stalks of ripening corn. It is composed of grass woven into a ball, possessing no perceptible entrance." The nests are probably not often placed in such exposed situations. Our little friend is, as a rule, far too acute to fix her abode where it would be blown about, rained upon, and exposed to the too-inquisitive glance of every passing owl or kestrel. She likes to have her house, her castle, secure and private, so places it near the ground, in some bramble, thistle, or other weed, that flourishes in the hedgerow. Here she rears her young in safety, making excursions to the corn-stalks to rob the ear of its grain, and abandoning her retreat, children and all, ere autumn strips off the sheltering leaves and discloses its position.

Some farmers are born naturalists. They scorn to place their corn on those stone vermin-proof supports of the farmyard which their landlord has so economic-

ally provided for that purpose, but prefer to stack it on the ground, in the corner of the field where it grew, so that they may have the pleasure of grumbling at the mice and rats for coming and eating it. And grumble they do, when winter has come, and they hire the noisy threshing engine, only to find half of their grain already threshed, ground, and consumed by those industrious little mortals. If there be any harvest mice in the neighbourhood, they will be found at the bottom of a rick thus situated, and being conspicuous by their bright fur, may then be easily captured.

Any kind of cage will answer its purpose, provided the bars be close enough together. But to observe our pets' climbing propensities to advantage, a dome cage is best, not less than eighteen inches square, with small dormitories in the wood-work at the base, and liberally provided with tight-ropes, fixed and swinging perches, as well as any other gymnastic appliance which suggests itself. There should also be a wheel, with a small removable tray underneath it, placed outside the wires.

The sleeping-boxes should not be larger than two inches square, for though these mice are anything but gregarious, two or three will somehow squeeze themselves into even that small area, till the wonder is how they manage to breathe; and if the boxes were larger, more would huddle together for the genial warmth of companionship. If the lid of a box be opened when they are asleep, the occupants will be found pressed quite flat, and fitting into each other like the sardines of a newly-opened tin; and even though a separate berth be provided for every member of the community, they will still pack themselves, as far as possible,



A MODEL CAGE.

into one compartment. This is objectionable, though unavoidable, for the heat thus engendered encourages fleas, which, though they bear the same proportion to the *Culex irritans* of the household as a prawn does to a lobster (thereby showing how Nature adapts herself to her surroundings), are none the less veritable fleas.

The drinking-trough should be so placed that the mice can get nothing beyond their head to the liquid ; for if exposed entirely, the sand or bran of the floor-board will soon find its way into it, and foul the water.

If several of these mice be turned into one cage, their first desire is to find out which has the hardest tail. With no provocation, one will creep behind his neighbour, in a manner most un-English, and deliberately nip a piece out of that appendage, and before long several tails will be found barked. When



this occurs, it is best to put the injured mice into a separate cage, there to await recovery (or, better still, to turn them loose altogether), after which a lasting peace will probably be established in the colony.

By nature insectivorous, the little animals, when caged, readily take the edge off their appetite with grain, but like to finish their dinner with one or two small beetles, earwigs, or big meat-flies, which are generally demolished from the head downwards.

If a cockchafer or any of the larger *Scarabæi* be introduced alive into the cage, the nearest mouse pats him on the head, or tumbles him about, trying to get up a game of "touch-last ;" but when in response the chafer merely falls on his back, waving his legs helplessly in the air, mousey scorns to attack such an ignoble foe. He is by no means afraid of such a coleopterous monster, but, for some reason not caring to eat him, refrains from wantonly taking life.

In order to see how the prehensile tail is used, a good plan is to pass an almond (of which the mice are



very fond), fastened to one end of a thin piece of string, down from the top of the cage. If they are "on the feed," the nut hardly touches the bottom before a bite is felt. Then the string may be quietly drawn up again, and rather than relax its hold upon such a favourite morsel, up comes the mouse with it, either swinging its body upwards and seizing the twine with its hind legs, or else hanging to the almond by its incisors and fore-feet, while its hind-legs swing about wildly, and its tail keeps making all sorts of curves, until in ascending it meets with a perch. This is at once grappled by that "fifth hand," which coils round it like a corkscrew ; and there mousey will enjoy her banquet, squatting on her haunches. Hunger satisfied, the almond is let go, and her next care will be to wipe her face with her hands, brush up her whiskers, lick her fur all over, and have a general clean-up ; and then, perhaps, climb down to the trough, prick up her little ears, and take a good drink, lapping the water with her tiny tongue, as a cat its milk.

I have kept these little creatures together in numbers, and so they have never bred in my cage. But it is probable that if a pair were put in a roomy cage in spring, with some suitable retreat for a nest, ere summer was over they would have the cares of a family devolving upon them. A. H. MALAN, M.A.

